

# new zealand gardener

APRIL 2015

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deter snails?



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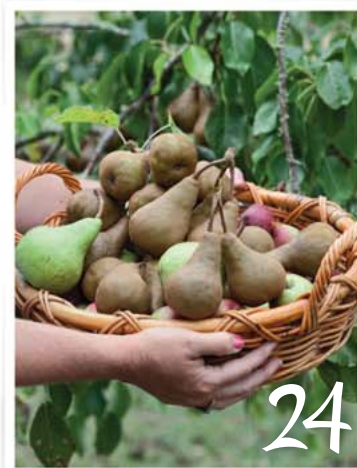


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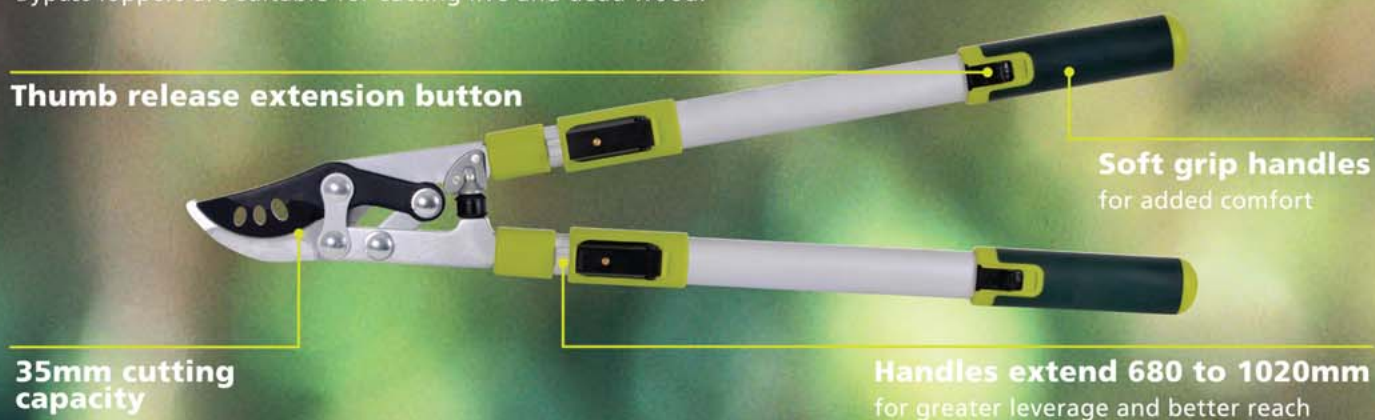




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*“Take poppy seed, for instance: it lies in your palm, the merest atom of matter, hardly visible, a speck, a pin’s point in bulk, but within it is imprisoned a spirit of beauty ineffable”*

*Celia Laughton Thaxter,  
American writer*

Last April, we sent out a packet of Flanders poppy seeds with every copy of *NZ Gardener*. It had been 100 years since World War I began, so we called on readers to sow these seeds on Anzac Day – both symbolically and horticulturally an appropriate time to start poppies from seed – and create their own living memorial to mark the anniversary of the start of the so-called Great War, in which so many Kiwis fought and from which so many never returned.

I didn’t anticipate quite how much the *NZ Gardener* Centenary Poppy Project would resonate with you all. Hundreds of readers wrote or emailed to say thanks for the seed, and shared photos of your poppies in bloom, or told me about the family members the flowers had been planted to remember. We also heard from people all over the country who’d taken the poppy seed in to their children’s schools and used it as an opportunity to talk about how the flower had come to be weighted with such significance, or tell stories about their own great-grandparents or great uncles and aunts who’d been involved. Others created memorial gardens in the grounds of their retirement village, or at their local RSA.

Jacq Dwyer sent me the photo on the left, of the poppies she grew beside the war memorial in the tiny south Taranaki township of Alton, which lists the 14 local men killed in World War I and the seven who died in World War II. “They looked beautiful there,” she wrote. “The red petals shone out like beacons and people were stopping to take photos and take a moment to remember those 21 men. It is never too late to remember them.”

This year we mark another significant centenary. On April 25 it is 100 years since New Zealand and Australian troops, alongside soldiers from Great Britain, Ireland, France, India and Newfoundland, landed on the windswept Gallipoli Peninsula. Although in military terms the campaign was a relatively minor aspect of the war as a whole, it was the first major military action of New Zealand (and indeed Australia) as an independent dominion. And it has come to hold a great deal of significance in our country’s sense of itself. Anzac Day, as it quickly became known, is now a day on which we remember those who have served our country, both in times of war and in times of peace.

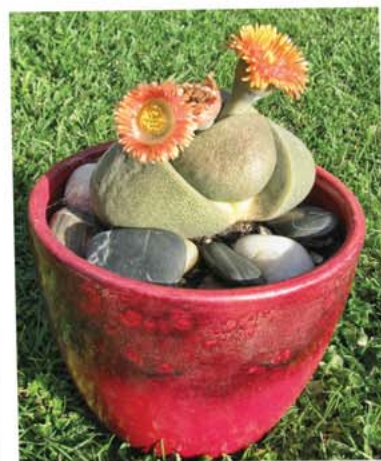
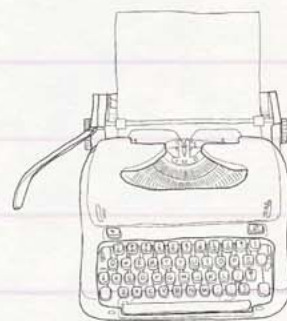
The RSA is planning a slew of events to mark this anniversary, but so many of their members took part in our Centenary Poppy Project last year, they asked us if we could perhaps do the same thing again. So in this issue you’ll find another packet of Flanders poppy seed. I don’t want to become mawkish about this at all, or celebrate any war in any way. Feel free just to sow the seed in your own garden and enjoy the flowers in spring and early summer (there’s advice on seed sowing success on page 10). Use it to create a garden to celebrate peace; or to remember your own fallen heroes, who might never have served in any kind of war. Sow poppies to celebrate the country we are lucky enough to live in now and everyone who helped create it. Or you can sow this seed to commemorate those first Anzac soldiers and the estimated 2,779 New Zealanders who died on Turkish beaches so very far away from home.

Last year, many of you worked together, with your school, or your workmates, or your community group, to create something on a more significant scale. If you’ve got an idea for something similar this year, then get in touch with your local RSA. They’ve got seed available for community projects. Australian historian Charles Bean wrote in 1946 that the Anzac spirit was one of enterprise, resourcefulness... and comradeship. So this Anzac Day, why not create something living and beautiful together.

Jo

Jo McCarroll





## MELIA? I SURRENDER!

I was glad to read Diane Fussell's letter in the March issue and find I'm not the only one to have a problem with a melia. Mine seems to enjoy dropping everything, everywhere it's not wanted. Yes, the butter-coloured leaves look great lying on the patio; I leave them till they're brown and then sweep, compost and use them for mulch. The shape of my tree is good for climbing, but now my grandchildren have grown up. And it is very popular with the local possum, which likes to gallop over my roof from the titoki at the front to the melia at the back. He is quite unafraid of anything and just stares insolently at me. My son set a trap a couple of years ago. Possum took the apple bait (twice) and then a blackbird was killed, so I decided it was better to live with the elephant on the roof. Fortunately he likes the melia so much he leaves my fruit alone!

Jan Harris, OTAKI

## MY BATTLE WITH MELIA

I wholeheartedly agree with Dianne Fussell's letter in last month's magazine about melias. We had a juvenile *Melia azedarach* tree near our house in South Africa, where it is a major plant invader. Given that the climate was hot and humid, in 10 years it grew rapidly into a huge tree, and made an incredible mess with its berries and sticks. The roots were also a problem in the lawn, and it didn't particularly seem to attract birds.

We decided it had to go, which started a concerted effort of assault by every method we knew to kill a tree, all to no effect! In the meantime it just grew bigger and bigger. Eventually, after chopping off the top branches, drilling holes into the trunk and pouring diesel down, we won the battle! I really would hesitate to recommend planting this tree anywhere near buildings – or, for that matter, at all.

Tonia Rabe, NEW PLYMOUTH

## OUR LITHOPS THRIVES OUTSIDE

I found your article on living stones (NZ Gardener, March) very interesting. It mentions that these plants cannot be grown outside in New Zealand, but we have had our lithops for several years now and keep it on our deck in Waikanae, north of Wellington, under the eaves. I have attached a photo of it in flower. Ours does not seem to have a flowering cycle as we have had flowers in the spring, summer and autumn. We water infrequently as the rain dampens the pot when the wind blows it under the eaves.

Angela Crespin, WAIKANAЕ

## PHYLLXERA IS HERE TOO!

In your article on grapes (NZ Gardener, March), it talks about phylloxera only being found in the North Island and Marlborough. I work for a vineyard contracting company and we see evidence of phylloxera all around us in Central Otago. We constantly spray our tractor wheels with bleach to prevent any cross-infection of this pest from one vineyard to the next. But I enjoy reading your magazine – keep up the good work.

Ken MacKenzie, GIBBSTON





### CHECK OUT MY BLOOD LILY PLANT

At the time of writing I counted 26 flowers on my *Haemanthus coccineus* plant. The bulbs are very pot bound and get very dry. When the large leaves are starting to dry off, starting at the bottom, I roll them up like a huge cigarette and tuck them tightly together among the bulbs. When they have completely dried, I pull them off.

Because the leaves are so large and long, I find that putting them in a pot like this keeps them really tidy.

Maureen Taylor, WHAKATANE

### WOMEN'S INSTITUTE LIVES ON!

As a regular subscriber my husband and I enjoy your magazine. I am also a Women's Institute member, however, and take exception to Jo McCarroll writing in editorial of the free recipe booklet last month, *The Art of Preserving*, about "dusty Women's Institutes". That is far from the truth. Yes, WI members have retained the homemaking and craft skills our forebears had, but they are active, vibrant groups with events such as craft and flower shows, concert parties and competitions. They also support other community groups and are keen to attract younger members and pass on their skills (your booklet will be an excellent aid). The WI cake stall at any event is always sold out. Dusty is not a fair or true description. An apology is in order!

Mavis Wing, CHRISTCHURCH

Mavis, you are quite right. The Women's Institute is still a relevant and lively organisation and in no way dusty! Apologies to members!

Jo McCarroll



### MY GORGEOUS GALTONIA

Many years ago in *NZ Gardener* I read about a double-flowered galtonia that had turned up in someone's garden. Bulbs were available for \$25 from a Tauranga nursery so I bought one. In all those years it came up with big, broad leaves but flowered only once – the buds turned brown before the flowers opened. Two years ago I moved to a retirement village where I have a house with a small garden, so I bought my bulb with me. This year it has finally flowered! Isn't it gorgeous?

Meg Bayley, AUCKLAND

### OODLES OF ZOODLES

When the editor of *NZ Gardener* writes about "zoodles", or noodles made from zucchini, being a great way to use up your surplus crop, I pay attention! Not something I'd heard of before, but I got onto the Milly's website and ordered my "spiraliser" straight away. It arrived in Piopio shortly thereafter. My first effort was zoodles with angel hair pasta and freshly grated Parmesan and pepper. Delicious! I am now making oodles of zoodles, considering baked nests of poodles (potatoes) and koodles (kumara). You've started something!

Karen Barrett, PIOPIO



### OUR SCHOOL'S PUMPKIN PROJECT

In the November issue last year, you offered readers free seed to grow a giant pumpkin. I decided that would make a great project for the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students I work with at Hastings Central School. I was late sending off for the seeds so it was early December before we got them planted into pots. Three of the four seeds came up and I transplanted them into bins in our community garden.

The students have been having great fun looking after the pumpkins since school started back. We are making a book called *Our Giant Pumpkin Project 2015*. There are lots of photos of the kids taking turns mixing worm wee or seaweed mixtures, measuring the size from stalk to tail, spraying for powdery mildew and doing moisture checks with the moisture gauge. They love watching the progress, and are always asking if they can go and see the pumpkins, so thank you again.

Vicki Crawford-Flett, ESOL teacher, HASTINGS

Are you taking part in *NZ Gardener's Giant Pumpkin Challenge*? Send us an update and a pic of your pumpkins and we'll publish a collection of them next month.

Jo McCarroll

### Win a Mitre 10 gift card valued at \$25

Every letter published on these pages wins a \$25 Mitre 10 gift card. Cards are redeemable for any goods sold at any Mitre 10 store throughout New Zealand and are valid for 24 months. Any remaining balance may be used on subsequent purchases. Send your letters to Mailbox, *NZ Gardener*, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141; or email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz.





POPPY CAMPAIGN



**WE WANT YOU**  
**TO SOW POPPIES!**





## Join us in sowing Flanders poppy seeds on Anzac Day to mark 100 years since Kiwi troops landed at Gallipoli

With their blood-red shades and ephemeral petals, Flanders poppies have come to signify the horrendous loss of life suffered on all sides during World War I. A whole generation of young men went to war and many never came back, or were marked by the experience for the rest of their lives. For New Zealanders and Australians in particular, the battle of Gallipoli was a turning point in our collective history, when thousands of soldiers battled the Turkish troops for months before the evacuation was ordered. Exactly 100 years later, this is still a significant event, politically and personally, for many of us.

So where does such a humble, even weedlike flower like the poppy come in? The connection stems from the Western Front, where the corn (later renamed Flanders) poppy bloomed on the devastated fields of northern France and Belgium. A Canadian doctor tending the wounded noticed the flower, and wrote "In Flanders Fields", a poem immortalising the poppy that would be recited by school children on Remembrance Day for generations.

Last year we teamed up with McGregor's and the RSA to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I with a free packet of Flanders poppy seeds for every reader. The response was overwhelming, and in many cases deeply touching. It was Anzac veterans coming back from war who founded the Returned Soldiers Association in 1916, to offer support to service men and their families who had been deeply affected by the war. And judging by the emails and letters we received from readers, the poppies were a welcome and timely reminder of the sacrifice of the few for the many.

### Growing guide

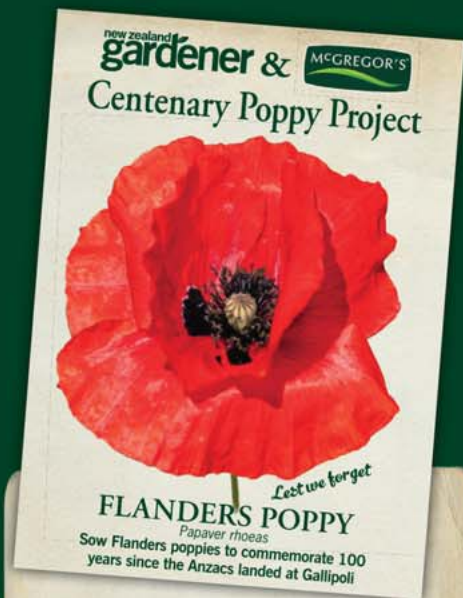
**Flanders poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*)** belong to the Papaveraceae family of flowers. They can grow up to 1m tall, and their single, red bowl-shaped flowers traditionally provide splashes of bright colour in early summer. In New Zealand they are sown on or around Anzac Day, so that they are in flower by Remembrance Day, November 11.

Sow them in any well-drained soil in full sun, and thin out once the seedlings appear. Once they have finished flowering, pull them out and save the seed for the following year. Alternatively, poppies self-seed very easily so you should get another display every spring.

Some of our readers asked if they could delay sowing the free poppy seeds they received last year, so that the blooms would appear for Anzac Day (they bloom this month in the Northern Hemisphere, although of course it is not a national holiday there). While we thought this was a nice idea, Mother Nature didn't seem that keen. Flanders poppies, like many spring annuals, struggle to make it through to autumn, particularly after a long, hot summer as we had this year. We'd suggest enjoying the flowers in spring and early summer instead.

### Get growing!

**RSA chief executive David Moger** has this to say about NZ Gardener's poppy campaign. "This is a special opportunity for us all to grow a living memorial to all who have served and sacrificed. Let's all join together and plant a sea of red poppies across New Zealand to celebrate and commemorate the brave acts of our forebears." What are you waiting for?



To mark the 100th anniversary of the battle of Gallipoli, NZ Gardener calls on Kiwis to create a living memorial

**THIS MONTH, EVERY READER WILL RECEIVE A FREE PACKET OF FLANDERS POPPY SEEDS.**

**Sowing instructions:** Poppies prefer a site with well-drained soil and full sun. These flowers look fantastic growing en masse: if planting in a drift, first spray McGregor's Weed Out to clear the area of weeds and grasses, wait seven days before sowing seed direct, then rake lightly and water. You could also sow them in pots, or start them in trays and plant them out as seedlings in spring. Feed your plants in early spring with a controlled-release fertiliser, such as McGregor's Multimax All Purpose Plant Food. Once they're flowering, you can feed them with a liquid fertiliser, such as McGregor's Fruitmax Flower & Fruit Food.

This special poppy seed is available only to NZ Gardener readers and will also be distributed by some RSA clubs. We'd love to hear how your poppies grow so keep us updated by sending an email to [mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz](mailto:mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz); or write to us at Centenary Poppy Project, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141.





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**April 16, 6pm • Palmer's Taupo**  
26 Totara Street, Taupo. Phone 07 378 5775

## Autumn in the vegetable patch with Kath Irvine



Join our autumn garden workshop where we'll chat about broccoli, celery, soil health, green crops, garlic and a whole lot more seasonal highlights. Organic gardening expert Kath Irvine has been designing and managing food gardens since the late 1990s. She is passionate about growing organic food and can help you plan and plant your own edible backyard. This workshop is designed to inspire and inform both the novice and the experienced vegetable gardener alike.

**April 23, 6pm • Palmer's Plimmerton**  
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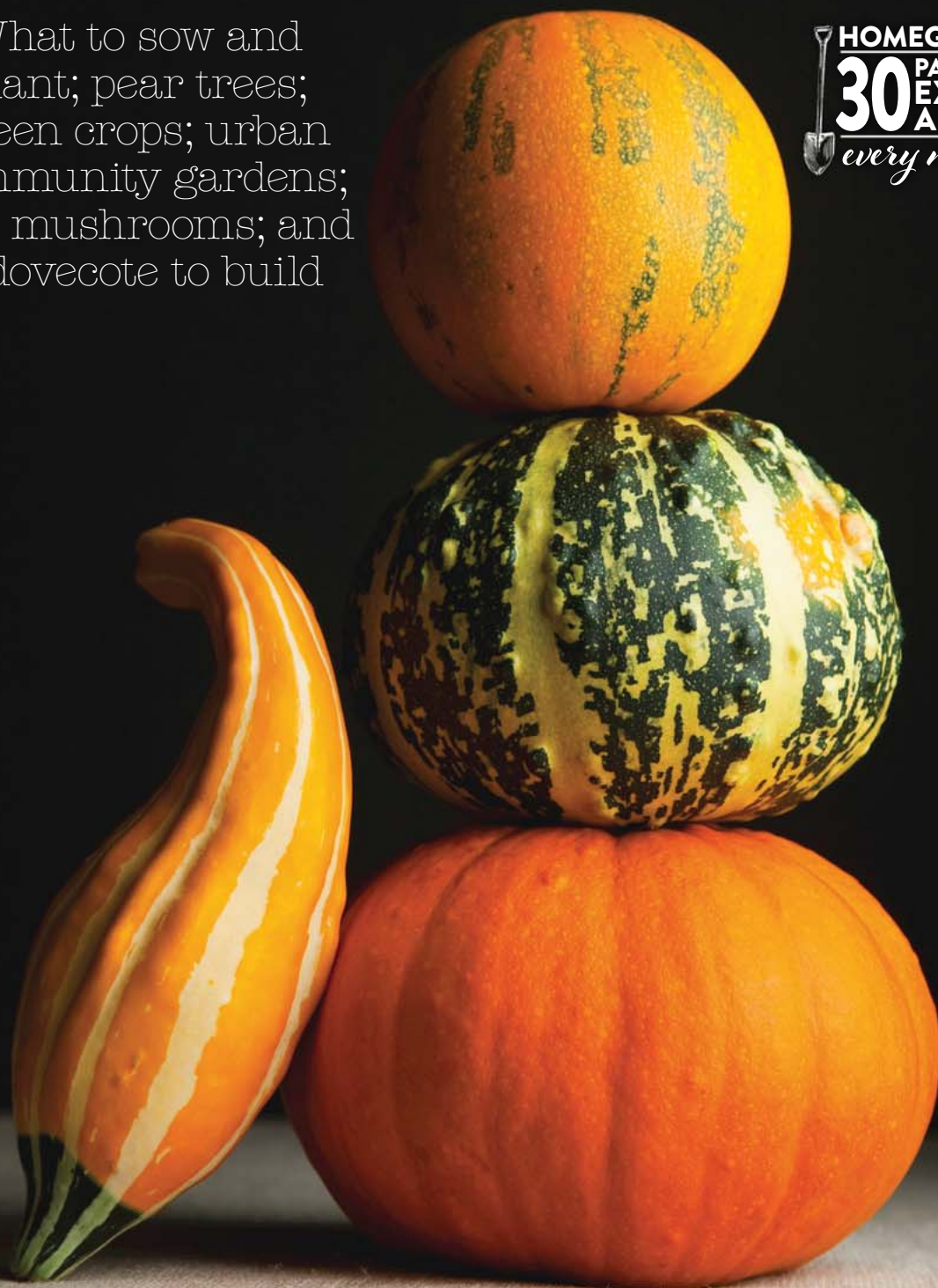
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# GROW YOUR OWN

What to sow and plant; pear trees; green crops; urban community gardens; bay; mushrooms; and a dovecote to build

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# WHAT TO SOW & PLANT

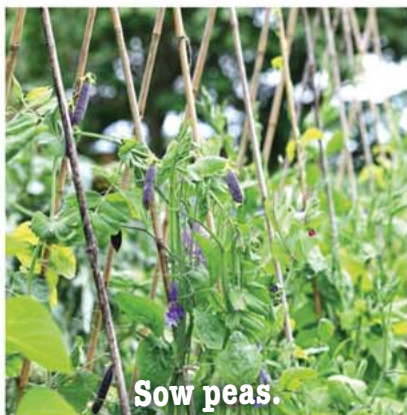
## Gardening by the moon

Robert Guyton's guide to planting and sowing in harmony with the lunar cycle

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<b>COLOUR CODING KEY</b>  Sow and plant  Cultivate only  Barren period  Sow root crops		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>  Feed liquid fertiliser to established plants on the 1st, 2nd & 3rd.	<b>3</b> Good Friday	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> Easter Sunday  Full Moon 1:06am
<b>6</b> Easter Monday 	<b>7</b> 	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>  Last Quarter
<b>13</b> 	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>  New Moon 6:57am
<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> Anzac Day  First Quarter
<b>27</b> Anzac Day observed	<b>28</b> 	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	 <i>April</i>		



# THIS MONTH...



**Sow peas.**

## • Sow broad beans, peas and leafy crops.

Traditionalists sow broad beans on Anzac Day, but any time this month is fine. Peas, dwarf-, climbing- and sugar snap, can go in now too; they like the cooler weather. Sow a row or two of miner's lettuce, spinach, silverbeet and perennial rocket, as well as carrots and beetroot. They will develop woody cores if you leave them to overwinter in frozen soil, so harvest them in 8-10 weeks and scoff them as tender baby veges. Sow Chinese cabbages now – they'll also be ready to eat in as little as two months if autumn conditions are favourable. Just protect them from any white cabbage butterflies still on the wing. It's too late to sow the much slower-growing non-Asian brassicas such as cabbages, cauliflowers and Brussels sprouts, but you can plant seedlings now – but again, you'll need to watch out for those pesky white butterflies.

## • Scent your house (and your loo!)

With few flowers to be had in my autumn garden, I've taken to putting a stem or two of kaffir lime leaves in a vase along with a few stalks of lemongrass and rosemary. It might not win any floristry awards – at best you could say it has a spiky, Ikebana look – but it infuses the place with a lovely fresh scent. And it's excellent in the loo!

## • Autumn is the perfect time to compost.

For good compost you need about three times as much carbon-rich, or brown, matter (that's fallen leaves, straw, paper, cardboard and aged sawdust) as you need nitrogen-rich, or green, material (fruit and veg scraps, grass clippings, fresh manure and green waste). Normally it's a struggle to get the ratio right: I always have a surplus of green and not enough brown, which leads to your compost getting wet, slimy and smelly. Stockpile brown material now while autumn leaves are in such abundance. Gather leaves as soon as possible after they fall from the tree – if they sit around the nitrogen starts to leach out. Also, as leaves dry out, the polymer lignin, which helps conduct water, hardens, so it's harder for the nutrients in the leaf to be transmitted to the soil.



**Feed citrus.**

## • Show your citrus trees some love.

Most citrus crops won't be ripe for a month or so, but keep up the food and water now to protect the immature fruit. (If the tree gets stressed through hunger or thirst, its first response is to drop its unripe bounty.) Sprinkle a citrus-specific fertiliser around the drip line of trees in the ground and water it in – don't dig it in, or you'll disturb the tree's shallow feeder roots – and give citrus in pots a regular soak and a fortnightly boost of liquid fertiliser.

## WIN a lawn rejuvenation pack from Yates!

Autumn is the time to perk up your lawns, and Yates has everything you need to do so. This pack includes Complete Lawn Insect Control, Weed 'n' Feed and Tuffgrass lawn seed. **TO ENTER:** Write your contact details on the back of an envelope and mail to Yates Giveaway, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter at [nzgardener.co.nz](http://nzgardener.co.nz). Entries close May 3, 2015.



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### STEP 2

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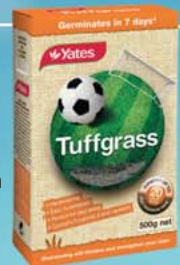
With one easy hose-on application of Yates® Weed 'n' Feed™ you can kill weeds before they start to multiply in readiness for spring, and feed your lawn to survive the winter.



### STEP 3

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COMMUNITY GARDEN

Proudly supplied by



Corn, sunflowers and cavalo  
nero jostle for space amid the  
communal plantings at Sanctuary.

# A space for everyone

PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG





A monarch feeds  
on cosmos.



Trevor Crosby in the glasshouse.

Christine Rush visits an inner city community garden that's providing food for body, soul – and the local apes

Allotments sprang up in England during the First World War, when food shortages forced councils to give over land for residents to grow their own vegetables. But they've never really taken off in New Zealand. When we all had quarter-acre sections, there wasn't the need. Then property values started rising, and subdivision became very lucrative. Look at a satellite map of many urban centres now, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a quarter-acre section still intact. This means less space growing fruit and vegetables, and with heart disease and diabetes sucking up huge amounts of health funding, local bodies are under pressure to release land for the production of nutritious food and to boost wellbeing.

Enter Sanctuary Community Organic Garden in Mt Albert, a drawcard in this year's Heroic Garden Festival in February. It was founded four years ago with the help of Richard Main from Gardens4Health, who used to teach organic horticulture at Unitec and ran the "Unitec Horticulture Sanctuary". After the polytech dropped its organic gardening course in 2008 it reverted to wilderness. Then committed locals came forward, advertised for plot holders and the garden in its current incarnation came into being.

"Community gardens are a strange concept for Kiwis," says Richard.

"But the Sanctuary model is a good one and Gardens4Health uses it to demonstrate how they can work. The big difference here is the supreme site in terms of soil fertility, the hard-working volunteers, and the mix of communal and individual plots. The main thing is they've stuck with organic principles and practice. Although it's not certified any more, those ideas are dear to the steering group and they can encourage people to adopt them."

A garden has existed in one form or another on the site for at least 100 years – considerably longer, if you take into account centuries of Maori settlement and cultivation of the fertile, sloping land that stretches from Mt Albert or Owairaka to Oakley Creek. Maori hand-digging tools have been found during archaeological surveys and the ghost of a local kuia is said to have appeared to former staff.

Today, some 40 individuals and families tend 68 individual plots and a communal area planted with sunflowers, kumara, and unusual varieties such as amaranth, lambs quarters, kiwano, casimiroa, yacon and peans. They are currently experimenting with the native American Three Sisters method, where beans grow up corn, underplanted with pumpkins (what they've learned: let the corn get tall and strong enough to act as a support before planting beans!).



Whimsy on an individual plot.



Common spinach, rosemary and  
bronze fennel in the communal area.





Catch crops such as marigolds are a common feature of the vege plots.



Chard

The broadly organic plots attract plenty of wildlife, including the lesser wanderer butterfly, the native mantid and several species of bees. And because of their methods, they don't have too much of a problem with crop pests – although local fauna such as pukeko, mice, blackbirds and ex-pet rabbits enjoy the bounty on offer.

Sarah Abbott has been at Sanctuary since the beginning – and before, as a student on the organic horticulture course. “Brendan Haore and Richard had a vision, they were the ones who drove the organic set-up and went beyond conventional horticulture. It was basically permaculture.” She and Trevor Crosby are part of the steering committee, and both agree that keeping

plot holders engaged and on board with the garden's principles is a challenge. “We keep a log book to see who's been contributing to the regular working bees. It's a chance for people to meet up, share a pot luck meal and take away some of the produce from the communal areas.”

Unitec provides the land and buildings for free, as well as water and two security guards (one of whom tends a plot of a weedy nightshade, and ships it back to Niue where it's carefully prepared and consumed as a delicacy). In return, two plots are available for the use of homesick foreign students, and building design students had a hand in constructing the wonderful bamboo shelter and raised beds. Rough areas surrounding the gardens are kept spray-free, and the resulting weeds and grass feed animals on the polytech's animal care courses. “The sanctuary was established over a decade ago to promote sustainable horticulture and the community garden is a perfect example of just that,” Linton Winder, from Unitec's department of natural sciences, says. It's great Unitec is able to support the local community in this way and we're absolutely delighted it has been such a success.”

Local organisations benefit too: nearby Auckland Zoo has been receiving regular loads of spinach and puha ever since one of its chimps developed a taste for it. Amy Robbins, the zoo's primates team leader, says: “We are really grateful for our partnership with the Sanctuary garden. The greens we receive are really useful additions to animals' feed. The baboons and orang-utans especially enjoy the puha, as we rarely get this.”

Integral to the permaculture system are the “unproductive” parts of the garden: including a food forest planted with the unusual and experimental: yacon, kei apple, a paper mulberry, pinenut (“the kernels are a devil to get out!” laughs Trevor) and babaco. Abyssinian bananas are inedible, but are grown for biomass and left to rot. There's a huge fig tree, left unnetted – “The birds get most of them, and provide guano for the soil beneath.” This is the way permaculture works: a kind of “ungardening” where nature is a key player. When the food forest became overgrown, a storm took out a number of the trees, which opened up the canopy and enabled plants below to flourish.



Other outlying areas include a swale (for filtering runoff), composting area, and a shelter belt that provides bamboo for structures, year-round flowers for pollinators, and a buffer against spray and trespassers.

It's the latter that presents the biggest challenge, practically and emotionally, for the garden: the constant trickle of fruit and veg stolen or "foraged", to put it more charitably. "Because it's always been public land – first as a mental hospital then as a polytech – some people think the food is free for all," says Trevor. "You understand some people are desperate but we wish they'd take the common spinach! Instead they target stuff they can sell, like fennel and globe artichokes. We wouldn't mind it if they asked, but they also pick the pumpkins when they're immature. We had a lot we were going to enter in a competition for

plot at least once a weekly, and give two hours a month in the communal areas. Failure to do so results in a friendly chat with the garden coordinator, and with a growing waiting list – at least six months long – the risk of eviction is real. Surprisingly, flowers are permitted.

"Decoratives are OK," says Sarah, "it's all food for the soul!" They do, however, try to discourage the more rampant edibles, such as mint, yams and brambles.

They're aiming to become self-sufficient in water, and are fundraising to repair their pump by selling produce at the Sunday morning Grey Lynn Farmers Market: basil, Florence fennel, scallopini, and fancy lettuce as well as sweet peas and zinnias are all popular.

True to the principles of permaculture, composting is key, says Trevor. "We aim to operate under a closed system – all weeds go into compost: the more benign

## Auckland Zoo has been receiving weekly loads of puha ever since one of its chimps developed a taste for it

community gardens and they all went missing. We won anyway – there was one hidden in the undergrowth they didn't take! But it's a major headache."

So what are the ingredients for a successful community garden? "Having the right people from the beginning makes a huge difference," Trevor explains. "Sanctuary is unusual in that we have large communal plots as well as individual ones." Sarah adds: "Here we say, 'This is the organic: take it, or leave it.' There is leeway though; we had a family moving on to a plot that had a large wasp's nest, so we had to use powder to protect the kids. You've got to consider how the intervention is going to affect soil or food production."

Plot-holders are encouraged to abide by the Sanctuary Code of Conduct, which is less draconian than it sounds: work your

into bins, oxalis goes in plastic bags and is buried deep in the compost to cook off, and tradescantia is double-bagged for eventual dumping in the food forest."

Liz Aitken tends the beautiful communal herb garden at the westernmost reaches. A relative newcomer, she took it over a year or so ago when it was still a 2m high jungle of bronze fennel, hemp, kikuya and comfrey. Now, it is divided into culinary and medicinal patches surrounded by anise hyssop hedges, and including fragrant Vietnamese coriander, bay cardoons, and tansy, all also sold at the market. "Because of the way we garden, Sanctuary has a huge amount of biodiversity, and that keeps things in balance," she says. "So we know that whatever is attacking our cabbages, its enemy is going to be here as well."

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Send us photos of the garden and, if selected, your school or community garden will win a \$300 prize package from Gardena, including a hose reel trolley, 15m hose, metal spray-gun nozzle, spade and fork. Send letters, photos and contact details to Garden of the Month, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or email digital photographs (approximately 1MB in size) to mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz.



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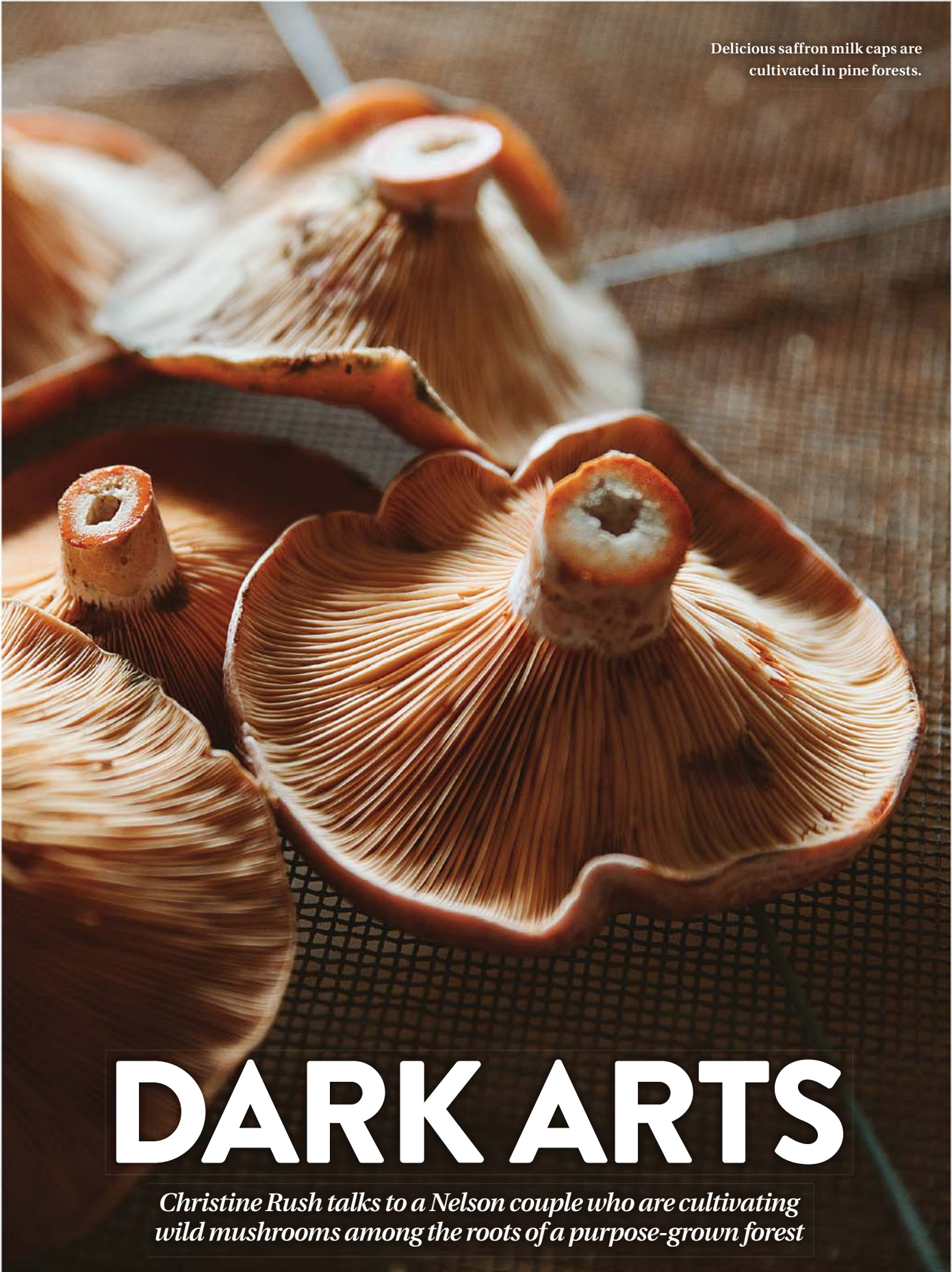
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Delicious saffron milk caps are cultivated in pine forests.

# DARK ARTS

*Christine Rush talks to a Nelson couple who are cultivating wild mushrooms among the roots of a purpose-grown forest*





*Forest fungi need only a little irrigation, maybe an inch or so of water, directed at the mycelium rather than the trees. They've loved the hot summer this year*

Food forests are an idea gaining currency right now, especially among fans of permaculture – but what about growing a crop symbiotically linked to your trees? That's just what Hannes and Theres Krummenacher have been doing since 2002 when they bought 35 trees inoculated with saffron milkcap, part of a Crop and Food Research trial, and planted them on their 48ha property in Upper Moutere. The beauty of this scheme is you get a continuous crop of mushrooms to sell each season, as well as timber after 30 or so years – not that they're chopping down their fungi forest any time soon. They now sell a range of mushroom-related products at the weekly Nelson Farmers Market.

Growing up in Switzerland, mushroom-hunting was a normal, everyday activity for Theres and Hannes. "Forests are public land in Switzerland," he says, "so you can roam freely and pick mushrooms without permission. My father was also a keen mycologist and forest controller in his village, which means that he was qualified to tell people which of the fungi they'd gathered was safe to consume." According to Swiss legend, Hannes says, all mushrooms are edible – "but some of them only once!"

Instead of the usual rows of warm, dark sheds, their mushrooms are grown in the forest. Trees arrive from the nursery as seedlings infected with mycorrhiza, which go on to form a vast web of mycelium under the soil's surface. These act as an extension to the tree root, getting into all the nooks and crannies of the soil and sucking up water and nutrients that the trees couldn't reach on their own. It's important to keep away from these delicate webs forming around the trees, and Hannes can't graze heavy-clodded cattle there, although there are sheep in their more recently planted forests.

After the initial trial was successful, they bought a further 500 milk cap-infected trees from Edible Forest and Fungi NZ, part of Oregon Nursery in Oamaru. Later, they started to inoculate the trees themselves, by planting seedlings in the root zone of already infected trees before transplanting to a different site. In 2011 they planted 400 radiata pines infected with porcini (*Boletus edulis*) in their chestnut orchard – the first farmers in New Zealand to try this potentially lucrative variety – which they are



expecting to fruit in the next three or so years. "We had some of them DNA-tested in 2014 and they still have DNA on them. It looks positive but we're not harvesting any yet. No one knows how long it takes because it's new." Another crop that is yet to bear fruit are truffle-infested trees from former DSR scientist Dr Ian Hall's trial, but the price they'll fetch when they do finally emerge makes it worthwhile.

Kevin Fearn, of Edible Forest Fungi, says the industry as it is, is somewhat experimental. "Most of our customers are lifestylers who like doing something different. People don't realise how many mushrooms from overseas have become naturalised in our bush, such as slippery jack. We suspect mushrooms are more forgiving than truffles, which are very

specific and like soil with very high pH, so in many parts of New Zealand this is going to be a highly modified environment. People think that they can just plant a tree and walk away, but it has to be done correctly."

So how much care do they need? Forest mushrooms need only a little irrigation, says Hannes, maybe an inch or so of water, directed at the mycelium rather than the trees. It was a hot summer this year – though according to local farmers this was fairly normal for Nelson. "This has helped with moisture and heat for the soil – the mushrooms love it. We're careful with house keeping, keeping the grass very short around the trunk and pruning lightly to ensure the soil stays warm and moist."

Indeed, temperature and moisture are critical in the production of these forest fungi. They are harvested between April and June or July each year, when the night time temperatures fall below a certain level and there is good rainfall without much frost. Over the years the couple has learned to recognise the ideal climatic conditions for when they start fruiting. "It's an autumn thing, so with the right weather you can tell people to start looking around in two weeks time for mushrooms to come up."

The business is flourishing; this year they're hoping to harvest more than a tonne for drying. In 2014 they managed 800kg of sliced and dried mushrooms and sold out three months before the 2015 harvest came on sale. "Our trees are getting bigger and the weather is kinder this year, so who knows?"





SAFFRON MILK CAPS

**LACTARIUS DELICIOSUS**

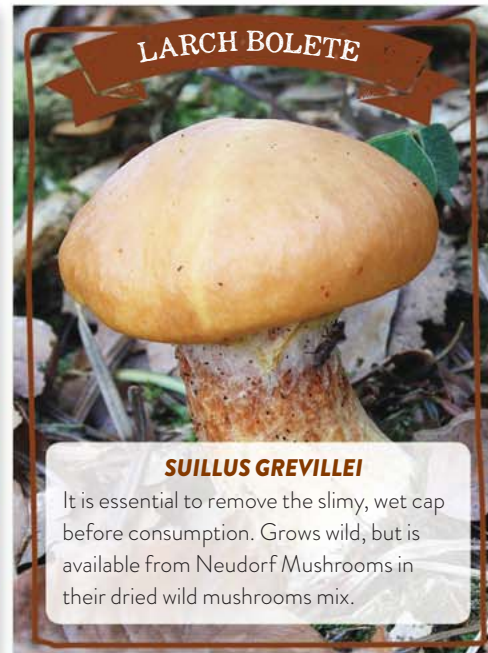
Eaten in Europe since Roman times, this has a mild, slightly bitter flavour. Can only be cultivated in pines and spruce plantations with specially inoculated trees.



PAINTED BOLETE

**SUILLUS LAKEI**

This grows only on Douglas fir, in low-pH, free-draining soils, in sheltered areas between 300m and 800m in the North Island, and up to 700m in the South Island.



LARCH BOLETE

**SUILLUS GREVILLEI**

It is essential to remove the slimy, wet cap before consumption. Grows wild, but is available from Neudorf Mushrooms in their dried wild mushrooms mix.

TRUFFLE TALES

The New Zealand truffle industry was pioneered in the 1980s by Dr Ian Hall, a mycologist at Crop and Food Research, who developed a method to infect trees. There are now more than 300 truffières here, 90 per cent of which are planted for Périgord or black truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*). This prefers a rich alkaline soil – an application of lime may be needed. It can take more than 10 years for a truffle-infected tree to bear fruit – truffles have been found from the Bay of Plenty to Nelson – but a crop is by no means guaranteed. The rewards can be great: in the European off-season, it can fetch \$3500 per kilo.

*Growing guide*

**“You can do this at home – provided you’ve got the land!” laughs Hannes.**

The Krummenachers source their spores from Edible Forest Fungi NZ and inoculate the pine, which then grow quite easily on their Upper Moutere property, according to Hannes. Slippery jacks are very common: “You can easily find them. Plant a radiata pine, and chances are, there are spores already in the ground and making some fruiting body,” he says. Fungi such as these don’t need to be fed, the whole idea of a mycorrhizal relationship is that they take everything they need from the soil. “That’s the beauty of symbiosis –

they exchange nutrients with trees, which take trace elements from the mycelium and in return give the mycelium the sugar they need to grow.” They do, however, prefer soil to be on the acidic side.

Alternatively, there are various mushroom-growing kits you can buy – try [countrytrading.co.nz](http://countrytrading.co.nz) – which include spores that can be saved after the initial harvest for later re-use. Oyster mushrooms in straw are quick and easy. They like a spot inside between 15 and 25°C with a little bit of light. Or you can buy wooden dowels inoculated with mushroom spores to infect freshly cut branches. The resulting logs will produce for up to seven years.



PINE BOLETE

**BOLETUS PINOPHILUS**

Unlike mushrooms, the Boletus genus has spores rather than gills underneath the cap. True to its name, this thrives in beneficial association with pine trees.



BIRCH BOLETE

**LECCINUM SCABRUM**

As its name suggests, this is mushroom is mycorrhizal only with birch trees. Can be used as a replacement in recipes that call for the more flavoursome caps.



SLIPPERY JACKS

**SUILLUS LUTEUS**

Originated in the forests of North America, now grows wild in New Zealand. Like the larch bolete, only digestible once you have removed the cap’s slimy layer.



*Mushrooms are an important non-meat source of B vitamins and minerals, so are an essential part of vegetarian diets*

## RECIPES

### WILD MUSHROOM SOUP

Serves 4

**Ingredients** • 200g button or swiss brown mushrooms • 10g Neudorf dried wild mushrooms • 30g butter • handful of freshly chopped parsley (don't be stingy with it) • 3 cups chicken or vegetable stock • ½ cup cream • 1 tablespoon corn flour or arrowroot powder

**Soak the wild mushrooms** in 1 cup of stock. Slice the fresh mushrooms. Heat the butter in a pot, add half of the parsley and fresh mushrooms. Cook until mushrooms become sloppy. Add the soaked mushrooms including the liquid, 2 cups of stock and simmer for 10 minutes stirring occasionally. Dissolve the corn flour in the cream and add while stirring the soup. Season with salt and pepper and remaining parsley.

### WILD MUSHROOM SPREAD

A sprinkling of beautiful dried mushrooms from Neudorf Mushrooms give this spread a very rich flavour. It looks and tastes dead posh, but it is so quick and easy to make. Perfect for a vegetarian buffet. Makes 1½ cups.

**Ingredients** • 250g button mushrooms, finely diced • 20g Neudorf dried wild mushrooms • 100ml of water, white wine, dry sherry or brandy • 1 knob of butter (about a dessertspoon) • 1 small onion, finely chopped • 50ml cream • 1 teaspoon cornflour or arrowroot powder • 1 teaspoon vegetable stock (I used ½ a teaspoon of Mushroom Salt from Neudorf Mushrooms) • Freshly chopped parsley.

**Soak the dried mushrooms** in the water or wine. Melt the butter in a pan over a medium heat and caramelise the onion. Add the button mushrooms and cook gently for 3 minutes then add the soaked mushrooms including the liquid, stock and parsley. Cook for a further 5 minutes. Dissolve the cornflour in the cream and stir into the mixture. Cook until thickened. Cool completely and serve with fresh bread or crackers. ❀  
Buy from [neudorfmushrooms.co.nz](http://neudorfmushrooms.co.nz).



# PERFECT PEARS

*With its delicate blossom, dappled shade and delicious fruit, this easy-to-grow orchard classic is a year-round delight*







*Espalier training is an excellent way to grow pear trees in a small garden, and to beautify a wall. Fruit is produced on stubby spurs, so will be productive for many years*

Pears are adaptable trees that grow and crop well in all regions of New Zealand. The hardy trees tolerate harsh winters and warm summers. They provide snow-white blossom in spring, lovely shade in summer and spectacular autumn foliage. Being deciduous, the trees will not cast shade on the garden, lawn or house in winter. Plus pears are a versatile fruit, preserving well sliced in quarters or in pastes, nice eaten fresh or paired with a strong blue cheese.

### Planting

Pear trees will grow best in free-draining fertile soil, but tolerate heavier and sandy spots. Like most fruit trees, though, they detest constant wet feet in winter. Choose a sunny spot with at least five hours of sun each day. A shadier position means fewer fruit and more problems with pests and diseases.

### Potential problems

Pear trees are affected by few pests and diseases, requiring little or no spraying in all but the warmest, most humid regions. A basic prevention programme would be an application of copper oxychloride or lime sulphur in winter and early spring, along with an oil in winter (don't mix lime sulphur and oil together).

An increasingly common problem is the pear blister mite, which causes unsightly blisters on the foliage. The mites over-winter under the dormant buds, emerging in warmer weather to suck goodness from the foliage, leaving a chemical that causes the discolouration of the leaves. These suckers can be difficult to control, but Yates recommends an application of lime sulphur, just before the buds open in spring, to smother emerging egg-laying mites. Fortunately, while the leaves look unpleasant, the mites don't affect fruit quality or tree health.

Along with apple and quince trees, pears can be affected by fireblight, a bacterial disease occurring early- to mid-summer. As the name suggests, the tree looks like it has been burnt by fire, with blackened leaves and branches. A telltale sign is a hockey-stick-hook shape to the tip end of the branch. It is very difficult to prevent fireblight, caused as it is by a vicious cocktail of temperature, humidity, moisture and bacteria.



Severe and hygienic pruning is necessary once symptoms appear, but more often than not it is a death sentence for a tree. It's important to get rid of the infected plant material – ironically, burning is safest – so that it doesn't infect other susceptible trees.

### Pruning & training

Pear trees naturally grow with very upright, columnar branches. For maximum fruit production and ease of picking, these should be trained to grow horizontally while still young and supple. This theory applies to regular-shaped trees and those trained in an espalier form. The pliable branches can be tied or weighed down until the wood lignifies, or stiffens, and stays in this position. Horizontal branches

produce more fruiting spurs than upright growth, and sap flow along the branches is slower, checking the overall vigour of the tree and limiting its height.

A central leader form is the most suitable shape for pears to maintain a main trunk of branches usually starting about 1m from the ground, then tiers every 60-80cm up the trunk. Any growth between the tiers (apart from fruiting spurs) should be removed from the trunk.

Espalier training is an excellent way to grow a few pear trees in a small garden, and to beautify a wall. Pears and apples are the easiest trees to espalier-train, as the fruit is produced on short, stubby spurs, so will be productive in a set form for many years. You can create simple horizontal cordons or step-overs, or for the adventurous more complex forms such as a Belgian fence or candelabra.

Sometimes rootstock suckering can sprout from below the graft union – usually 15-20cm above ground level. This should be snipped off as close to the trunk as possible, and sealed with pruning paste (such as Bacseal) if the wound is greater in diameter than a pencil. Pear varieties may be grafted on to quince rootstocks, which have a distinctive, lighter green leaf so are easily identifiable. I have seen a pretty spectacular, but horticulturally abhorrent “pince” tree: half the tree was the pear and half was the quince rootstock that had been allowed to grow to its full potential. It's not recommended to let the rootstock keep sprouting and growing though, as it can often be at the expense of the grafted variety.



# Now is a great time to plant Autumn fruit



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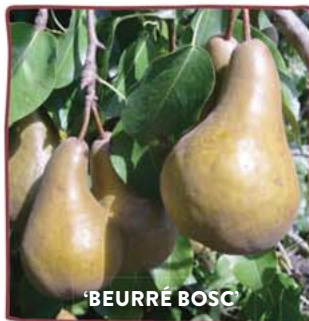
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**'WINTER NELIS'**



**'BEURRÉ BOSCH'**



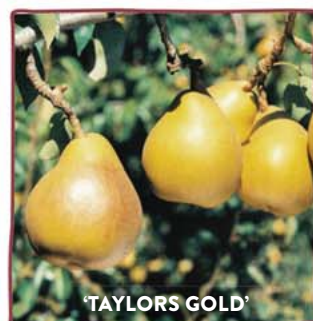
**'DOYENNÉ DU COMICE'**



**'STARKRIMSON'**



**'GARDEN BELLE'**



**'TAYLORS GOLD'**

PHOTOS: KATE MARSHALL

## *Care tips*

Of all the fruit trees, pears are probably the most susceptible to biennial bearing, which is when the tree produces a huge crop one season, and nothing the next while the tree recovers from the over-exertion. Avoid alternate-year cropping by thinning the fruitlets in December, leaving two fruit per bunch.

Like all fruit trees, pears crop best with a few applications of fertiliser (like Tui Fruit Food) through the summer; if the tree has been shy-bearing it would also benefit from a dose of potassium in the form of sulphate of potash in autumn. Established trees rarely need irrigation, but trees less than five years old will appreciate regular, deep watering in dry summer spells.

## *Harvesting*

Pears are unique in that the fruit tastes best when harvested while hard, chilled and then ripened at room temperature. The fruit ripens from the core outwards, so if left on the tree to ripen the centre would be mushy by the time the outside flesh is ready. Pears are usually ready to pick when the fruit detaches from the tree when tilted to horizontal, apart from 'Beurré Bosc', which is harder to pick. The fruit should then be refrigerated for up to six weeks, before bringing up to room temperature for a few days to

complete the ripening process. Test ripeness by gently pressing on the skin near the stem – if the skin gives to the pressure, the fruit should be perfectly ready to enjoy.

Keep a diary of your harvest dates each year so that you have an approximate time to pick each variety. There will always be seasonal variations, but harvest dates will only move by a week or so with cooler or warmer weather conditions.

## *Varieties & pollination*

Most pears grown now for home gardens and even for commercial orchards are older varieties, many of which are heritage ones from the 19th century. These varieties are so good that they are hard to be beaten on flavour, storage and productivity. With their later flowering time, pears are less susceptible to damage by spring frosts, usually blooming when the weather is more settled. Almost all pear varieties need cross-pollination from a nearby (different) variety. Pear blossoms are fussy in their choice of mates, so plant the recommended pollinator or choose a double-grafted tree whose varieties will cross-pollinate each other. Pear flowers are not as full of nectar as apple blooms, so aren't as attractive to bees. Try not to plant other flowering plants or trees nearby that could distract bees from helping with the pear pollination. ❀





# PEAR VARIETIES

OUR PICK OF WHAT  
TO GROW AND WHEN  
TO HARVEST THEM



VARIETY	POLLINATORS	DESCRIPTION	HARVEST
'BELLE DU JUMET'	Partially self-fertile but best planted with another variety like 'Williams' Bon Crétien'.	A very sweet sugar pear with green skin that turns yellow when ripe.	Early season (February-March)
'BEURRÉ BOSCH'	'Doyenné du Comice', 'Taylors Gold', 'Williams' Bon Crétien', 'Winter Cole', 'Winter Nelis', Nashi 'Hosui' and Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Traditional brown-skinned pear. Flavour is best after 3-4 weeks of refrigeration.	Mid season (April)
'CONFERENCE'	Self-fertile.	Long-necked green fruit with some brown russet. RHS Award of Garden Merit (UK).	Mid season (April)
'DOYENNÉ DU COMICE'	'Beurré Bosc', 'Williams' Bon Crétien', 'Winter Cole', 'Winter Nelis', Nashi 'Hosui' and Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Classic green-skinned pear, juicy melting flesh with rich flavour. RHS Award of Garden Merit (UK).	Mid – late season (April-May)
'GARDEN BELLE'	'Beurré Bosc', 'Doyenné du Comice', 'Packham's Triumph', 'Seckel', 'Taylors Gold', 'Williams' Bon Crétien', 'Winter Nelis', 'Winter Cole', Nashi 'Nijisseiki' and Nashi 'Hosui'.	A dwarf tree, growing to just 2.5-3m tall. Sweetly flavoured pears with green, mildly russeted skin.	Mid season (April)
'PACKHAM'S TRIUMPH'	'Précoce Morettini', 'Seckel', 'Winter Nelis' 'Taylors Gold'; Nashi 'Hosui' and Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	A good keeping variety with large fruit.	Mid season (April)
'SECKEL (WORDEN SECKEL)'	'Packham's Triumph', 'Winter Nelis'; Nashi 'Hosui' or Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Small red-skinned gourmet fruit with exceptional flavour – known as the sugar pear for its sweetness. Fireblight-resistant.	Mid season (April)
'STARKRIMSON'	'Conference', 'Packham's Triumph', 'Williams' Bon Crétien' and 'Winter Nelis'.	Crimson-skinned, sweetly flavourful fruit.	Early season (March)
'TAYLORS GOLD'	'Beurré Bosc', 'Packham's Triumph', 'Williams' Bon Crétien', 'Winter Cole' or 'Winter Nelis'; Nashi 'Hosui' or Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Russeted form of 'Doyenné du Comice', with the same sweet, finely textured flesh as the original. This variety was found in a Nelson orchard and is now grown around the world.	Late season (May)
'WILLIAMS' BON CRÉTIEN (BARTLETT)'	'Beurré Bosc', 'Doyenné du Comice', 'Taylors Gold', 'Winter Cole', 'Winter Nelis', Nashi 'Hosui' or Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Green-yellow fruit that is suitable both for bottling and eating fresh. Stores for up to three months in refrigeration. RHS Award of Garden Merit (UK).	Early season (February)
'WINTER COLE'	'Beurré Bosc', 'Doyenné du Comice', 'Taylors Gold', 'Winter Nelis', Nashi 'Hosui' or Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Reliable producer of rounded brown-skinned fruit that keeps well into winter.	Late season (May)
'WINTER NELIS'	'Beurré Bosc', 'Doyenné du Comice', 'Packham's Triumph', 'Taylors Gold', 'Winter Cole', Nashi 'Hosui' or Nashi 'Nijisseiki'.	Small green fruit with light-brown russet patches and buttery flesh. Excellent storage.	Late season (May)



# Noble leaves

*It has crowned Olympic champions, adorned wreaths and adds a savoury note to any dish. Bay is truly a herb for all seasons, says Jane Wrigglesworth*







*Bay also has an affinity with certain sweet dishes, especially milk-based ones like custards, rice puddings and crème brûlée*

**B**est known for its aromatic properties, bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) is an evergreen plant that is both ornamental and edible. As star ingredients go, it might not win any prizes, but as a supporting player, it shines.

"Taste two plain tomato sauces side by side, one of them cooked with a bay leaf or two," says Laurie Harrsen, from the American spice giant McCormick & Co. "The difference it makes is amazing. It's a foundational flavour, a workhorse – not the star."

Bay is one of those herbs that can be used to flavour almost anything – stews, casseroles, soups, stocks and sauces. The leaves can be inserted into slits cut into fresh meat, or placed under the skin or in the cavity of chicken before cooking. Fresh leaves work well with kebabs or the stems used as the actual skewers. And, of course, no bouquet garni is complete without them.

Bay also has an affinity with certain sweet dishes, especially milk-based recipes like custards, rice puddings and crème brûlée. Bay leaf ice-cream and lemon and bay sorbet are two restaurant favourites in European countries.

Dried leaves are often used over fresh ones for their more subtle flavouring, and in recipes, dried and fresh are not really interchangeable. Use fresh leaves sparingly, or even remove them before the end of cooking, as they can overpower a dish. In either case, fish the leaves out before serving, because the tough leaves will not break down. Shards from the dry leaves have been known to lodge into the soft tissue of the throat.

### *Medicinal uses*

**Bay leaf has been used for** medicinal purposes for centuries. These days it is less commonly used – at least not by home gardeners – but bay leaves still have anti-inflammatory, calmative and antispasmodic properties. They were traditionally used for stomach, liver and intestinal problems. You can infuse the leaves in hot water to soothe mouth ulcers and inflammation, and to treat stomach bloating. Infuse 5-10g dried leaves in 1 litre of freshly boiled water for 10 minutes. Drink two or three cups a day. (Note: pregnant women should avoid medicinal doses of bay.)

Bay can also be useful for soothing aching limbs and muscles, and is often made into a rub. Or you could try adding a handful of leaves to bath water for a similar effect.

Bay is also said to have antibacterial and antifungal properties, and can be used to treat skin disorders – bay oil is a common ingredient in acne products. Finally the herb allegedly promotes hair growth, although this is more likely to work by calming and protecting the skin and hair follicles.

### *Growing guide*

**Bay trees like a moderately** rich, free-draining soil. Dig compost into the soil before planting and add slow-release fertiliser. If growing in containers, mix compost into the potting mix. As slow-growers, they're well suited to containers, as well as hedging and topiary. Plants may eventually reach around 15m high, but in a home garden situation, they are unlikely to get to that if snipped on a regularly basis.

Bay trees grow in sun or part-shade, and my own tree grows and flowers extremely well in the latter. The flowers start out as tiny buds, 2-3mm in diameter, opening to equally tiny cream or yellow-green flowers, about 1cm in diameter. Male and female flowers grow on different trees though, so in order to get the blue-black berries that follow the flowers on female trees, you need to grow a male plant nearby. Unfortunately, we don't necessarily know what we are getting in the shops, but if you look closely you can tell the difference. On a basic level, female flowers of the bay laurel have a single pistil and two rudimentary stamens. The male flowers have 12 stamens.

The dried berries can be used as flavouring in cooking. They also yield an oil that apparently repels fleas and other biting insects, in much the same way as the bug-repelling leaves which, when thrown into your flour bin and cereal boxes, are said to repel weevils and pantry moths.

Plants are difficult to grow from seed – they can take several months to germinate – which is probably why you don't see the seed for sale. And of course, if you don't have a seed-producing female plant that's been pollinated by a male, you won't be able to collect your own seed. But if berries do form, these plants can actually self-sow.

You can also take cuttings, though again, this process is slow-going. It takes three or more months to even form roots. If you do try to take cuttings, don't let them dry out. Don't let them sit in water either, or they will end up rotting.



For faster-growing, healthier plants, feed bay trees in the ground twice a year – once in early spring and again in summer. Potted plants can be fed more regularly with liquid fertiliser.

Watch out for scale insects, which can reduce the health of your tree as well as lead to sooty mould. Sooty mould is a black fungus that grows and feeds on the sugary wastes (honeydew) excreted by sucking insects like scale. You can simply wash off the mould with soap and water, but you also need to deal to the pests to stop the mould reoccurring.

### *How to train a bay standard*

**It's fairly pricy** to buy a fully mature bay standard, but you can easily train your own. Bear in mind, however, that it's a slow process.

Start with a young plant that has a single straight stem and plenty of growth at the top. Stake the tree to provide support. As it grows, remove

the lower side shoots. When the main stem reaches 20cm higher than you want the standard to be – trunks of standards are typically 1m long – snip off the growing tip, and the side shoots too to about three leaves. When the side shoots have grown a further five leaves, trim them back again to three leaves. Repeat this process until you have a tight, leafy ball shape.

### *Barley twist & plaited stems*

**Ornamental stem effects** can be achieved with a little time and patience. As with training a standard, start with young trees with flexible stems.

For a barley sugar stem, insert a wooden pole or length of dowelling as close to the centre of your pot as possible. Train one or two stems around the pole like a barley twist. Tie the stems to the pole as they grow to keep them in place. Pinch off any side shoots and all other stems. Let the main stems continue

## RECIPES

### **Goat's cheese with olive oil and bay leaves**

You can add flavour to goat's cheese by marinating it in olive oil and herbs. Use a good quality cold-pressed olive oil and a fairly dry cheese.

Place goat's cheese in a large jar with 3-5 bay leaves, a sprig of thyme and savory, and either peppercorns or coriander seeds. Cover with olive oil, seal the jar and leave to marinate in the fridge for a week.

to grow to the desired height and when the stem growth has hardened, remove the ties and wooden pole.

For a plaited stem, choose a plant with at least three strong stems and braid them together, removing all other stems on the plant. Use a stake to support the plant as it grows. The plaited stems will eventually fuse together where they touch, forming a strong graft. ❀

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# LET IT LIE

*Green manure feeds the earth, improves soil structure  
– and beneficial bugs love it too, says Jane Wrigglesworth*





*When nitrogen-fixing legumes such as clover and lupins are dug in to the ground, the nitrogen becomes available to the next crop*

A great way to build healthy soil, or to revitalise it after harvesting, is to plant a cover crop. Even small gardens will benefit from one. Cover crops – also known as green manures, living mulch or catch crops – are fast-growing plants used by home gardeners and commercial growers to cover bare soil and improve soil structure. When dug in while still green, they return valuable nutrients and organic matter to the soil.

Green manure is typically grown over winter as beds become available – once you’ve dug up your summer and autumn veges, for example – and then dug into the soil in early spring in time for the new growing season. Green manure has similar advantages to compost, raising the fertility and organic content of soil once dug in. It can be especially useful as a source of readily available nitrogen for subsequent crops.

There are other benefits too. While they are growing, cover crops act as a food source and shelter for beneficial insects. They suppress weeds where bare land might otherwise be invaded by them. They can protect soil from rainfall damage, drying out and crusting, and they can even shield microbes from UV damage. The fibrous roots of some cover crops can help improve drainage, aeration and soil structure, and they can help prevent soil erosion as well. Some crops can also act as a natural steriliser for soil pests.

“Mustard and some other brassica cover crops are known to have an effect against nematodes and some other soil-borne diseases,” says soil scientist Dr Tim Jenkins from the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Technologies in Christchurch.

“Generally if you stimulate soil biology with a healthy dose of organic material, there is less risk of soil-borne diseases, as the diseases may be outcompeted or consumed by the biological activity. Some cover crops, including mustard, buckwheat and phacelia, are excellent for feeding natural enemies of pests with their flowers.” This means a reduced need for pesticides.

Cover crops can also help reduce the need for chemical fertilisers. “Any species will contain nutrients and when incorporated into soil these are readily available to the next crop,” says Dr Jenkins.

Leguminous cover crops, such as clover, hairy vetch and lupins, add large quantities of valuable nitrogen to the soil along with organic matter. They fix their own nitrogen, catching nitrogen gas from the atmosphere and converting it into soil nitrogen that plants can use.



The fixed nitrogen is transferred to the stems and leaves of the growing legume. When the legumes are dug into the ground, the nitrogen then becomes available to the next crop, whereas if the plant is removed and discarded, the nitrogen goes with it.

Some crops are also useful at capturing nutrients from the soil. “Lupin and buckwheat are excellent at accessing phosphorus from soil minerals,” says Dr Jenkins. “Cereals or grasses in particular are good at soaking up minerals and nitrogen. Chicory was found to catch the last two years worth of nitrate leaching.”

Weed suppression is another reason to use cover crops, especially if you select the right types. In a series of field trials at Lincoln University’s Biological Husbandry Unit in Canterbury during the 2003, 2004 and 2005 growing seasons, several crops came out tops for their weed suppression abilities.

“Ryecorn, triticale and oats, either alone or mixed with a legume, were especially effective and gave significant (72% and 90%) reductions in weed dry weight. The weed-suppressing effect was also noticeable six weeks after harvest of ryecorn and forage radish in the spring. This may suggest a mild allelopathic [growth-inhibiting] effect but the study was not designed to investigate the mechanism.” In concluding their trials, the scientists summed up: “Oat and peas, oat and tares, and forage brassica produced excellent growth and weed suppression during the winter and were financially viable cover crop options. Mixtures of cereals and legumes increased available soil N and are probably more beneficial than cereals alone.”





## DIGGING IN

As a rule, your cover crops should be cut down three weeks before planting and before your cover crop has reached full flower. You can do this by hand or with a lawn mower. Simply leave the material to act as a mulch on top of the soil or dig it in to the top 25cm of soil. If cultivating in, make sure you leave for three weeks before planting to prevent nitrogen robbing as the residues start to decompose. You might also consider leaving a remnant strip of cover crops after planting, which will provide a continuing food source and habitat for beneficial insects.

A green manure crop can be any from a range of fast-growing plants, but, as the trials suggested, a mix of crops is more effective. Green manures work best when they are a mix of legumes and non-legumes.

"Legumes provide nitrogen fixation and cereals improve soil structure with their fibrous roots," says Dr Jenkins. "There is also more biomass created and a better exclusion of weeds than with growing just one species."

For example, oats and hairy vetch are great companions. Hairy vetch is a legume and able to fix its own nitrogen. The root system of oats is good for soil structure, capturing soil nutrients in the topsoil and mining nitrate and potassium deep down in the soil. Together, this cover crop supplies both nitrogen and phosphorus, improves the soil (resulting in better water infiltration and crumb structure), is highly weed-suppressant, increases beneficial ground-dwelling insects, and is able to be mulched *in situ*.

Mustard and oats is another good combination. Mustard is one of the fastest-growing crops and its pungent roots discourage plant-parasitic nematodes. It also helps to improve

the soil and absorbs excess nitrogen and moisture from manure. Oats or barley sown alongside the mustard can improve drainage.

Green manures can also be grown over the summer period to fill gaps in the rotation and/or provide fast nutrition to subsequent cash crops being planted in the late summer or autumn, says Dr Jenkins. "Suitable crops for this include buckwheat, phacelia and mustard, all of which provide biological control-enhancing benefits through flowering."

So after harvesting your broccoli in spring, for example, a cover crop could be planted to suppress weeds and add nitrogen and organic matter to the soil. In autumn, lettuce, spinach or another leafy crop could be sown.

Bear in mind, though, that brassica cover crops should not be planted after other brassica crops such as broccoli and cabbage, as they are susceptible to the same diseases.



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# GREEN MANURE GUIDE

CROP	BENEFITS	WHEN TO SOW	DIG IN	COMMENTS
<b>BARLEY</b> ( <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L.)	Suppresses weeds, prevents soil erosion, absorbs excess nutrients.	January to March or early spring.	Before seeds set.	
<b>BLUE OR NARROW-LEAF LUPIN</b> ( <i>Lupinus angustifolius</i> L.)	A nitrogen-fixer, it aids phosphorus efficiency, and the fibrous roots improves soil structure.	Late summer to March.	Late Oct/early Nov to allow good spring nitrogen fixation.	Susceptible to fungal and viral diseases. Should not be grown in the same field in successive years.
<b>BUCKWHEAT</b> ( <i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i> )	Quick to establish, excellent weed suppressor, efficient phosphorus uptake, one of the best for promoting biological control, or bringing in good bugs.	Only sow after all danger of frost has passed. For biological control, monthly repeat sowings will provide ongoing flowering.	At full flowering but before seed set.	Can itself become a weed if allowed to set seed.
<b>CHICORY</b> ( <i>Cichorium intybus</i> )	Its deep tap root improves soil structure and drainage, and catches nutrients from deep soil, providing trace elements selenium, copper and zinc.	Ideally in spring, when soil temperature reaches 12°C – most varieties are slow to grow in winter.	At any stage.	Drought-tolerant.
<b>(Brassica spp.)</b>	Brings in beneficial insects, helps manage plant pest nematodes, suppresses weeds, alleviates soil compaction and a nutrient catch crop.	September to autumn.	Before seed set.	
<b>FORAGE RADISH</b> ( <i>Raphanus sativus</i> L.)	Weed and erosion suppressor, deters soil-borne pests, alleviates soil compaction and a nutrient catch crop.	Autumn or early spring.	In spring. Break up tap roots to speed decomposition.	Rapid growth.
<b>HAIRY VETCH</b> ( <i>Vicia hirsuta</i> (L.) Gray)	Fixes nitrogen, protects from soil erosion and suppresses weeds.	Late summer/early autumn.	Before full flowering.	

After harvesting broccoli in spring, a cover crop can be planted to suppress weeds and add nitrogen and organic matter to the soil, before planting greens such as lettuce and spinach in the autumn



Trials at the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Technologies in Christchurch found that cover crops are most effective when a mixture of legumes and cereals are grown together

CROP	BENEFITS	WHEN TO SOW	DIG IN	COMMENTS
<b>MUSTARD</b> ( <i>Brassica</i> and <i>Sinapis</i> spp.)	Fast-growing, brings in beneficial insects, helps manage plant pest nematodes and suppresses weeds.	September to autumn. For biological control effect, repeat sow every six weeks for ongoing flowering.	Before seed set.	Select a hot mustard if grown for soil disease and pest nematode control. Wait until crop is fully flowering (higher glucosinolate levels), mow (activates the process of glucosinolate changing to natural toxin isothiocyanate), incorporate into soil immediately and irrigate.
<b>OATS</b> ( <i>Avena sativa</i> L.)	Improved soil structure, captures nutrients in top soil and nitrate and potassium in deeper soil, suppresses weeds and prevents soil erosion.	January to March or early spring.	Before seed set.	
<b>PEAS</b> ( <i>Pisum sativum</i> L.)	Nitrogen fixing and suppresses weeds.	Autumn or spring.	Before seed set.	Rapid growth.
<b>PHACELIA</b> ( <i>Phacelia tanacetifolia</i> )	Brings in beneficial insects and limits nitrate leaching.	Early spring to summer. For biological control effect, repeat sow every six weeks for ongoing flowering.	Before seed set.	Grows well in dry soil, frost-tolerant.
<b>RYECORN</b> ( <i>Secale cereale</i> L.)	Suppresses weeds, reduces soil erosion and a nutrient catch crop.	February/March.	Before seed set.	Very tall cereal.
<b>SUBCLOVER</b> ( <i>Trifolium subterraneum</i> L.)	Fixes nitrogen, weed and soil erosion suppressor, soil loosener and a living mulch.	Autumn.	Before seed set.	Some of the hard seeds may germinate the following year.
<b>TARES</b> , aka common vetch ( <i>Vicia sativa</i> L.)	Fixes nitrogen, protects against soil erosion and suppresses weeds.	Late summer/early autumn.	Before full flowering.	
<b>TICK BEANS</b> , aka broad beans ( <i>Vicia faba</i> )	Nitrogen fixing, and brings in beneficial insects.	February to April or very early spring.	Late Oct/early Nov or leave for seed crop.	Can be sown later than most other winter cover crops.
<b>TRITICALE</b> ( <i>Triticum</i> x <i>Secale</i> )	Suppresses weeds, prevents erosion and a nutrient catch crop.	January to March or early spring.	Before seed set.	Very tall cereal.



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# DIY DOVECOTE

*Cooing doves are oh-so-soothing. Here's how to build them a home*



## MATERIALS

**You need:** 1 sheet of 12mm untreated ply • 4m of 18mm square pine batten • 1m of 10mm x 40mm pine beading • 4g x 25mm interior timber screws • 7g x 25mm exterior timber screws • Power saw • Power drill • Jigsaw • Clamps • Wood glue • Filler, sandpaper, paint, brushes • 1 x 100mm x 100mm post, M5 x 25 gutter bolts & 2 galvanised L brackets

**Cutting measurements** From the ply sheet:

- Back & front panels 600mm x 450mm with angled top (side measurement is 300mm)
- Two side panels 376mm x 300mm
- Two floors 376mm x 576mm
- Lower floor partition 376mm x 200mm
- Two roof panels 500mm x 400mm
- Three landing platforms 200mm x 70mm

**Cost \$116.42, plus paint**





**1** Position the 150mm x 100mm popholes, 60mm from the bottom for the lower holes and 275mm for the upper. Drill a start hole and cut out with the jigsaw. Draw and cut the decorative bottom edges.

**2** Mark the position of the lower and upper floors. Centre, glue and screw an 18 x 18mm x 576mm batten 12mm below it to support each floor. Attach battens at each side and a 300mm batten along each top edge to support the roof (as shown).

**3** Cut an 18mm x 18mm square out of each corner of the lower floor and the top edges of the partition. Mark the centre of the lower floor and attach the partition.

**4** Slot the lower floor into position between the front and back panels, and screw in the floor from underneath by screwing through the batten on the front and back pieces and into the floor. Secure the partition by screwing through the upper floor batten into the square cut-out.

**5** Attach the side panels by screwing into the interior batten on the front and back. Mark the post position and drill the L bracket holes. Slide the top floor into position.

**6** Shape the landing platforms then glue and screw a 190mm length of batten to the long, straight edge of each. Attach the platforms at the bottom of each pophole.

**7** Cut a 35deg angle to the top edge of both roof panels. Fill the screw holes, then sand and paint dovecoat, roof and post with Resene Quick Dry Primer and 'Lumbersider'. Butt the roof edges together and, using exterior screws, attach the roof by screwing into the battens. Fill screw holes, sand and apply a second topcoat to the roof.

**8** Screw in the L brackets and attach the dovecoat to post. Cut out a decorative strip from the 10mm x 50mm pine panel and glue and screw into position using interior screws. Fill, sand and apply a second top coat to the dovecoat and post.

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A close-up photograph of a wool carder bee (Anthidium lanatum) on a bright yellow flower. The bee is covered in thick, greyish-white woolly hair. It has a black thorax and abdomen with distinct yellow bands. Its wings are dark and translucent. The background is a soft, out-of-focus orange and yellow gradient.

# BEST DEFENCE

*The wool carder bee looks like a cuddly newcomer to New Zealand gardens, but pity the insect or bee that encroaches on its territory*





## The bees dive-bomb anything that contemplates coming near the flowers. Even the much larger bumble bees are bumped and bundled out of the sky

I saw the movie *Top Gun* again the other day. It's one of those films that brings out the daredevil in me, which in turn connects with my deeper, inner Peter Pan. It's probably a boy thing, but I couldn't help thinking about the way we learned to fly these fast machines. Humanity has developed some impressive modes of transport, most of them on the back of some sharp observations of the natural world, I reckon. You show me *Top Gun* and I'll show you the wool carder bee in your garden.

This beastie is about the size of a honey bee, belongs to the same Hymenopterous order of insects and is one of the more recent additions to our gardens. It was found about 10 years ago in Nelson, Napier and Auckland and has since spread well south of Christchurch. When you Google its scientific name *Anthidium manicatum*, you'll discover it is a beastie from the old country and Europe, up to western Asia and down to north Africa. Over the past decades it has done a runner across the world, touching down in many new places, including the United States.

The wool carder bee is particularly easy to follow in our autumn gardens, especially when there are a lot of labiates: lemon balm, mint, coleus, oregano, plecthranthus, salvia, teucrium – the list of plants in the family Lamiaceae is just about endless. These are the flowers of interest; these are the flowers to “own” and defend from any other pollinator in the neighbourhood. And that is exactly what the wool carder bee does, right throughout the day.

Its *Top Gun* tactics are truly spectacular. The bees dive-bomb anything that so much as contemplates coming near the flowers. Even the much larger bumble bees are aerially bumped and bundled out of the territory. Fast hoverflies are followed and pursued in high-speed chases. For those insects hoping to rely on their defensive poisons delivered by lightning-fast stings (bees and wasps come to mind), the wool carder bee has a combat manoeuvre that leaves them either wondering what happened, or crushed to death.

A male *Anthidium* has some seriously sharp, curved teeth, implanted on the edge of his abdomen, like studs on the face of a punk rocker. An aerial attack often involves grabbing the target with a curled abdomen, so that those teeth crush the hapless bee out of the sky. The bee's sting simply dashes through thin air.

In the Midwest and eastern United States, where the wool carder bee became established a few decades ago, there are some concerns that this species has a negative impact on native pollinators, which is likely to affect commercial crops and native plants. But a 2011 study by the University of Auckland's

Jo-Anne Soper indicated this interloper doesn't bother our native bees much at all, but that the honey bees may have a somewhat harder time with these kamikaze pilots.

The speed with which the male wool carder bees hoon through the garden is observed more and more often, judging from questions on talk-back radio. From a purely entertainment point of view it is spectacular to watch the battles “live-on-air”. What is not often seen is the way they gather their plant-derived “wool”. But when you follow the females you may find that their favourite plants are the hairy ones: species such as lambs ear (stachys) for hairy leaves and globe thistle (echinops) for hairy stems.

By scraping and cutting the hairs off these plants, the females gather the softest nesting material. The mandibles are perfectly adapted to cut and separate the plant's tomentum, which is then transported between the legs in a big, hairy ball. Like most solitary bees, their nest is often in a dark and dry cavity, to prevent direct sunlight heating the nursery to lethal levels. I've seen nests in the rebates of ranch-sliding doors, window frames and bamboo tubes.

A typical nest is made up of dozens of round hairy balls, each containing a cell with a developing larva. These immature grubs are provisioned by mum with some nectar and lots of pollen. The pollen really is the power nutrient for growth: proteins are the building blocks of new bees, whereas nectar provides a quick dose of energy.

The whole larval life cycle takes place inside that sealed cell; from egg to mature larva and pupa. When the adult bee emerges from the pupal skin, it uses its fabulous and complex multi-tool to gnaw its way through the cell wall (see image below). I have heard that loud scratching and gnawing many times on some quiet nights in my office.

In most parts of New Zealand, there should be two generations of *Anthidium* each year; one in spring/summer and the second in mid-summer/autumn, leading to the cohort that hibernates over the winter.

Some are concerned about these introduced pollinators, simply because they are really good at patrolling their airspace and chasing away the pollinators for a few months of the year. As these wool carder bees are oligolectic – meaning they mostly using pollen from a restricted range of host plants – there is something you can do to minimise their presence. Don't grow

plants of the family Lamiaceae and avoid some Scrophulariaceae (such as foxglove or linaria). But what would my garden be, in the warm summer days, without rosemary and lavender and a spectacular chase like a miniature air show? Probably a boy thing! 🍀







OUR PANEL THIS MONTH:  
Lynda Hallinan and Robert Guyton

# Ask an expert

## FRUIT & VEGE GROWING ADVICE THIS MONTH

**Q CODLING MOTH**  
*I used pheromone traps this year but more than half of my apple crop was destroyed by codling moths. I think that the traps enticed the bugs from miles away to breed in my apples. How can I conquer these pests?*  
HUGH REID, WANGANUI

**A** Actually, pheromone traps aren't designed to control codling moth. They work as a monitoring device to let you know the best time to spray. Lynda Hallinan suggests hanging the traps in early spring as the first blossoms start to open, and count the number of dead male moths stuck in the trap every couple of days. When you get a dozen, it's time to spray. That's because it takes about a week for the eggs to hatch, and one female moth can lay enough eggs to ruin up to 50 apples. You've got to spray the larvae before they get in the apples because once inside, you can't reach them. To kill them, use a caterpillar spray such as Yates Success. If you have dwarf trees, you could shake Yates Tomato Dust over them.

It's often suggested that you wrap corrugated cardboard around the trunks in summer so the caterpillars crawl inside to pupate, then take off the cardboard in August and burn it before the pupae hatch. But as Robert Guyton warns, doing that provides an ideal spot for more pupae to survive the winter. If you forget to remove the cardboard you might actually see the population increase!

Barbara  
Smith

**Q SQUASH AGAIN?**  
*I have grown a crop of monster spaghetti squash. Apart from steaming and adding butter and herbs as vegetarian spaghetti, how else do you suggest I use them?*  
JILL CARR, NEW PLYMOUTH

**A** Spaghetti squash grow like pumpkins and can be stored for several months on a rack in a dry, cool place. (Seeds available from [kingsseeds.co.nz](http://kingsseeds.co.nz).) They are named for the way the flesh separates into spaghetti-like strands when cooked. Roast, steam or microwave wedges of squash until tender, scrape out the strands and drain for 15 minutes. Use straight away or store covered in the fridge.

The strands can be used with any pasta sauce, such as bolognese or marinara. Try adding lashings of homemade pesto and serve with toasted pinenuts and shaved Parmesan on top.

Add to a fritter batter along with chopped fresh chilli and coriander. Shallow fry until golden and serve with sweet chilli sauce.

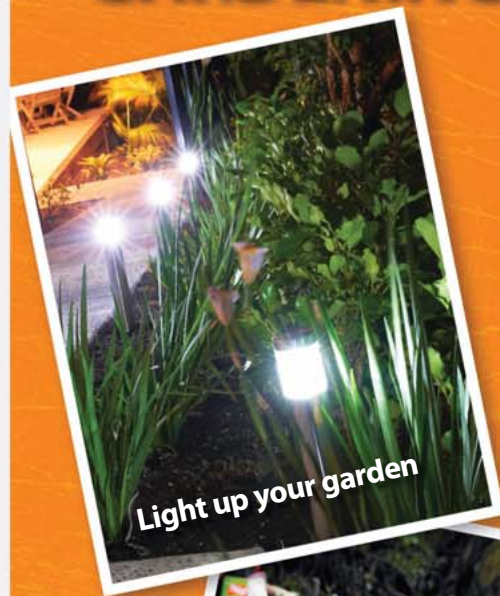
They can also be substituted in noodle recipes. Stir through sliced spring onions, chopped red peppers, tahini, soy sauce and rice vinegar, and garnish with sesame seeds.

Make a lasagne-style casserole with stacked layers of a cooked mixture of onions, courgettes, mushrooms and tomatoes, spaghetti squash and cottage cheese. Top with soft bread crumbs and grated cheese and bake until brown and bubbling.

Barbara Smith



# AUTUMN GARDENING



Light up your garden

**Q** **STINKY FOE**  
*These bugs have infested my beans. The beans have been sucked dry. Can you help me identify whether it is friend or foe?*

BARBARA WILSHER, KATIKATI

**A** Definitely a foe! These are green shield beetles and you are not alone. We've had lots of questions about them this season. The long, dry summer must have provided perfect conditions for a population boom.

Also known as stink bugs, green shield beetles (*Nezara viridula*) are sap suckers that cause a lot of damage to crops such as beans, corn and tomatoes.

It's a good idea to start control measures early in the season as soon as you spot the first adult beetle, as each female can lay hundreds of eggs. Getting in early in this way can prevent a population explosion.

Catching them by hand is a good method of control. A good time to hunt for them hiding under leaves is early in the morning before they warm up in the sun. Hold a jar under the bugs and they'll often leap off the plant and fall into the jar.

Crush the beetles (wear gloves!) and drop at the base of the plants. The stinky smell is a danger warning to other beetles which often drop to the ground where they can be stamped on or caught and crushed.

Another tactic is to grow sacrificial catch crops that attract the shield beetles away from your edibles. Sunflowers and cleomes work well.  
*Barbara Smith*

**Q** **CLEANING UP**  
*I had a great tomato crop in spite of a bad case of blight. Do I need to sterilise the frame the tomatoes grew on?*

JAY RICHARDS, AUCKLAND

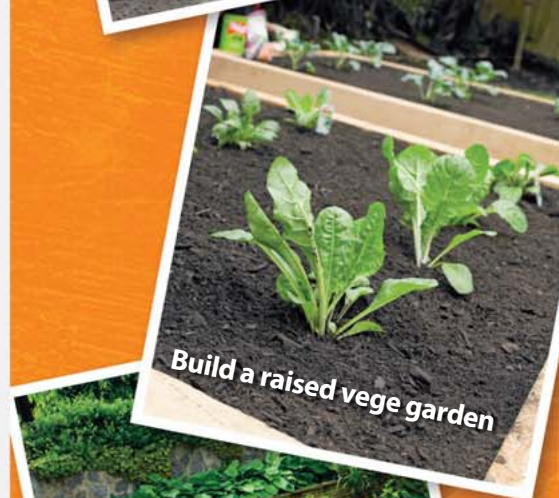
**A** Late blight starts as a few brown leaves at the base of the tomato and, before you know it, the whole plant withers before your eyes. It's common in warm, humid weather, but don't despair. As you've found, if blight starts late in the season you can often get a substantial crop of ripe tomatoes before the vines turn up their toes.

Obviously, prevention is better than cure. Give each plant plenty of room so there is good air movement around the leaves. Don't splash the leaves while watering. Feed well. Strongly growing plants are more disease-resistant. Remove any diseased foliage as soon as you spot it. Copper sprays, Yates Tomato Dust or a general fungicide can slow down the spread of disease.

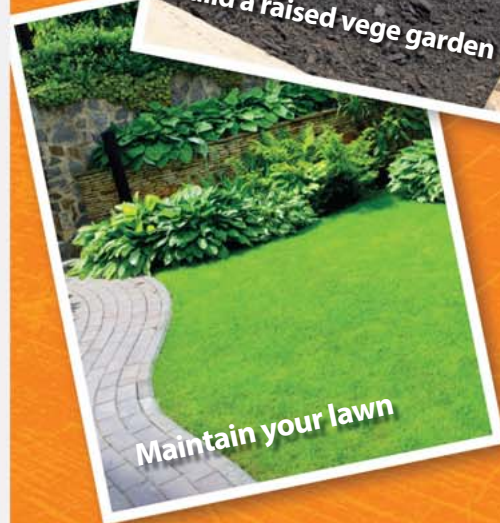
Don't compost any diseased plants. Burn or dispose of them in the council rubbish. Clean up any debris on the ground as well.

Don't plant either tomatoes or their relatives, potatoes, in the same place next year.

Cleaning the frames and removing any trace of diseased leaves or plant ties is a good idea. But keeping the frames sterile would be impossible and there are more fungal spores blowing in on every breath of wind.  
*Barbara Smith*



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# PEOPLE & PLANTS

Lynda Hallinan does a spot of seasonal seed-saving





# if walls could talk

Behind the red brick boundary of a modern Northland home lies a delightful potager modelled on the royal gardens at Highgrove

STORY: CAROL BUCKNELL PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG





The bee-friendly perennial and shrub plantings provide a verdant outlook from the outdoor entertaining area.





The boxy modern home sits in stark contrast to the traditional potager.

Caroline Locke is unsure whether she's a gardener who cooks or a cook who gardens. But after visiting her wonderful contemporary potager in Northland there can be little doubt about the gardening side of the equation. Sheltered from the south by a red brick wall and edged with espaliered apple trees, the 500m<sup>2</sup> garden has the elegant structure of a traditional potager enlivened by the bold colour of flowering shrubs and perennials, planted to attract pollinators. Anchoring the whole composition in the 21st century is the house, a sleek, black steel rectangle on the western boundary designed by architect son Tom Locke.

Seventeen years ago Caroline and husband John bought a small piece of farmland 1km from the Mission House in Waimate North, and set about building their garden. Their aim was to be self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables and they knew the area had good, fertile soil. The two-hectare section was very private, says Caroline. "We bought the land in 1998, at a time when we were thinking about the next steps in our lives."

The couple planned to develop the garden gradually and later build a small house on the land designed by son Tom, who was living in London at the time. Ultimately Caroline was to stop working and devote herself to the garden and her grandchildren.

It had been a long-held dream to design a garden where they could grow all their own food, she says. "The first seed of the idea for the potager garden was sown in 1980, when I was given a book by the Tichborne sisters, *The Cook's Garden*. It was instant recognition. I recently opened that book and a page

fell open to an illustration of an ideal vegetable garden. I realised I had incorporated nearly every aspect of that drawing into my garden here."

By 2008 Caroline and John had planted many of the native trees and were ready to start on the potager. On reading an article about Prince Charles's walled potager at Highgrove, Caroline decided to create her one herself. After night classes in landscape design she felt able to develop a plan, which she then had drawn up. "I already had ideas floating in my head; it was a matter of getting the skills and techniques to put them into practice."

An essential aspect of the design was that it should incorporate permaculture principles. She also wanted to divide the garden into zones: vegetables, herbs and citrus close to the house for easy access when cooking; perennials further out. Beyond the walled garden she envisaged an orchard of heritage fruit trees.

"One of the first things we did was have a fencing contractor put up the wire fences for the espaliered apples which gave us an outline to work with," she remembers. "I decided to use espaliered apple trees for two of the boundaries because it would have been too expensive to build structural walls around the entire potager. In summer they look like green walls and in winter they are deciduous. I like that seasonal process."

Next on the list: the house. Their brief to son Tom was for a building that would be warm in winter and cool in summer, and have one level with easy access so they could grow old in it without needing to make modifications. A 70m<sup>2</sup> studio/garage provides extra space for guest accommodation.



The reconstituted Cotswold stone dog is a reminder of the Lockes' much-loved German short haired pointer, Jimmy





A photograph of a garden path. On the left, there is a large bush of lavender with tall, spiky flower spikes in shades of purple and white. Above the path, a dark metal archway forms an 'apple tunnel', with several green apples hanging from the branches. To the right of the path, there is a large, bushy orange tree with several ripe, bright orange fruits. In the background, a red brick wall and more green trees are visible under a blue sky with some clouds. The path is made of dark gravel and is scattered with fallen petals.

Inspired by the Lost  
Gardens of Heligan in  
Cornwall, the apple tunnel  
is planted with three early  
varieties for succession

*Most of the flowers were  
planted to attract bees but  
they also remind Caroline  
of certain people – it's a  
garden of memories as  
well as edibles*





**Fruit trees are Caroline's passion; the Christmas plums are from a neighbour's trees.**

"We had lived in small spaces before on a boat and in an apartment so we knew we didn't need a larger house. This is the way to live, we believe," says Caroline. "My son was not very pleased to have to design a house to go with a garden, rather than the other way around which is more usual. But I think he is pleased now with how it looks."

After the house came the lovely 20m brick wall along the southern boundary. Due to building regulations it had to be built of concrete block and faced with recycled bricks, but this is so well done it's impossible to detect from the garden. Not only does the wall protect the garden from the south-westerly prevailing winds, it also creates a warm, north-facing environment that is ideal for espaliered fruit.

"Our builder predicted the temperature near the wall would go up a degree or two, and he was right," says Caroline. "The wall allows me to plant tender plants nearby such as the vanilla passionfruit, curry leaf tree and frangipani. The wisteria had been sulking in another part of the garden but when I moved it beside the wall, it took off."

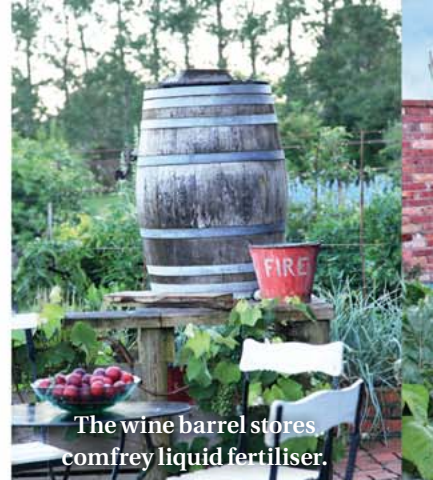
Most of the flowers in the garden are planted to attract bees but they are also all Caroline's favourites, plants that remind her of certain people. "It's a garden of memories as well as edibles."

Although she tries to restrict her flower colour palette Caroline admits she has not always been successful. To cool everything down she has planted many white blooming plants. Another design trick was to take the wall colour from inside the house out into the garden to strengthen their visual connection. "The inside of the house is painted a buttery yellow Resene 'Golden Glow', so I planted a 'Graham Thomas' rose and recently 'Jude the Obscure', another rose in the same colour range."





*The asparagus bed is framed with an actual brass bed head*



The wine barrel stores comfrey liquid fertiliser.



Hydrangeas grown from cuttings.

Mass-planted alstroemeria pick up the boat shed's red.



Caroline's brother built the raised beds while visiting from the UK, using bricks sourced from around Northland.

It's the fruit trees in her kitchen garden that really make Caroline's heart sing, however, particularly apples, of which she has more than any other species. Three early varieties are planted for succession in the apple tunnel, which was inspired by one she has seen in the Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall: 'Jonathan', 'Vaile Early' and 'Discovery'. "My pride and joy in the garden would have to be the espaliered apple trees," she confesses. "They look beautiful to me – I love bending plants to my will."

There are also numerous avocado, citrus and olive trees, the latter producing "a little bit of oil" last year, an asparagus bed framed with an actual brass bed and a thyme walk.

"Prince Charles has a thyme walk at Highgrove, so again, that garden may have been an influence," she muses. "I intend to put paving stones into ours, as he has, so the grandchildren can walk on it without stepping on a bee."

Her grandchildren's love of the garden has been something of an unexpected surprise for Caroline. "I never pictured it with kids running around when I designed it, so when it happened I was delighted. To sit on the terrace in the summer and hear their squeals of delight is magic." ❀





Asparagus ferns are left to form ferns to feed the crowns for next year.



Alstroemeria



Hemerocallis 'Annie Golightly'



Foxgloves



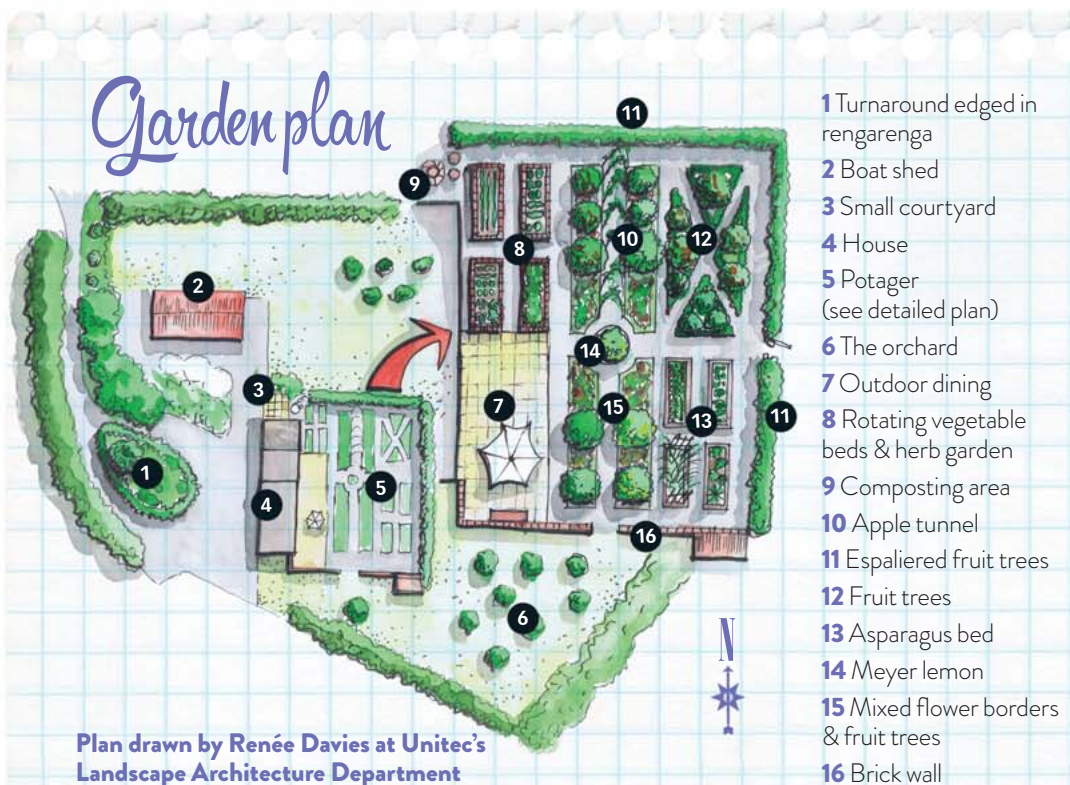
Cleome



White hollyhock



Opium poppy



- 1 Turnaround edged in rengarenga
- 2 Boat shed
- 3 Small courtyard
- 4 House
- 5 Potager (see detailed plan)
- 6 The orchard
- 7 Outdoor dining
- 8 Rotating vegetable beds & herb garden
- 9 Composting area
- 10 Apple tunnel
- 11 Espaliered fruit trees
- 12 Fruit trees
- 13 Asparagus bed
- 14 Meyer lemon
- 15 Mixed flower borders & fruit trees
- 16 Brick wall

## DIY potager

Want to recreate Caroline's kitchen garden? Here are some tips from NZ Gardener's *DIY Garden Design* (\$15.99, mags4gifts.co.nz) on potager design. Don't build raised beds all at the same depth. Root crops need deep beds; salad greens can grow in half that. Vege gardens need year-round access, so it's worth shelling out on gravel, paving, brick or fine bark paths. (Grass is a pain to mow and can rapidly turn to mud in winter if you're pushing a wheelbarrow up and down.) Chunky raised beds look great and can double as seating in small spaces – buy railway sleepers (they will rot, but line them with plastic if you want to delay that) or pour your own concrete sleepers.



## SOUTH ISLAND

The west-facing holiday home is on the edge of the Crown Terrace near Queenstown, with panoramic views of lakes Wakatipu and Hayes, Coronet Peak and The Remarkables beyond.





# Rabbit Run

Wakatipu can be an unforgiving location for a landscape designer, so when the local bunnies began banqueting on brand new native plantings, it was time to get tough

STORY: PRUE DASHFIELD PHOTOS: CLAIRE TAKACS







Terraced lawn between large sweeps of red tussock on the south side of the house.

W

hen Brooke Mitchell was presented with a new project on the Crown Terrace near Queenstown, winter snow, summer heat, strong winds and mostly absent homeowners were the least of his problems. Instead, the landscape architect's biggest challenge was Wakatipu's insatiably hungry, libidinous rabbits. Their presence was no surprise – they were visibly hopping about during Brooke's preliminary site inspections – but their impact on the garden, not to mention the budget, was a shock. "We didn't realise the severity of the problem we were facing." Who knew they were so numerous, or so fertile, or so damn hungry all the time? "After about a year we were pulling our hair out," he says.

For Brooke's clients, the rabbits' depredations were compensated to some degree by their novelty and entertainment value. During holidays at their New Zealand alpine retreat, the owners and their guests, armed with air guns, made sport with them from the front deck. They couldn't do that at home.

The contrast between Singapore, where the garden's owners usually reside, and Wakatipu couldn't be more marked. The former is tiny, tropical, densely populated; the latter rugged, empty, open. "This is their escape, their retreat," says Brooke. "There isn't even an internet connection." In short, they can be completely private here, which is why Brooke, who made the garden after all, is doing all the talking.

The architects engaged Baxter Design Group, of which Brooke is a director, to do the landscaping on the site on the Queenstown-Wanaka Road. One of two five-hectare

lots that were formerly part of Glencoe Station, it lies 650m above sea level and can be said to revel in the elements: blanketing snow for weeks or months at a time; hot dry summers; prevailing westerly and southerly winds.

It also overlooks the entire Wakatipu Basin: Lake Hayes in the foreground, Lake Wakatipu beyond, Brow Peak and Coronet Peak to the north, and The Remarkables to the south. Heaven on earth, in fact. "The views are breathtaking, some of the best I've seen," says Brooke.

The clients met Brooke in Queenstown at the end of 2008. They wanted a garden that would enclose the west-facing house and sink it into the ground, then gradually dissolve into the existing landforms and plants on the rest of the property – shelterbelt trees, matagouri, gorse, ryegrass, wild broom and scrub. (This untamed zone has been fenced off and is grazed by livestock from adjoining Barley Station.) Plantings were not to intrude on the heroic views, and needed to be robust enough to withstand extremities of climate, easy to maintain, and to change with the seasons.

From his initial drawings the clients were satisfied that Brooke was on the same page, so they allowed him to finish the book in peace. "They could see the design vision and never really questioned what I was doing from very early on," he says. "They were great."

Their house sits in a shallow depression on the edge of the Crown Terrace, wrapped in sculptural forms of flowing lawn, native grasses, terraced retaining walls and a rugged creek that hug it into the earth. Aside from basalt, all the hard landscaping materials – schist, stones,



The row of English lime trees, underplanted with *Carex testacea*, will be pleached as a hedge. Morven-Ferry Hill is visible in the distance.



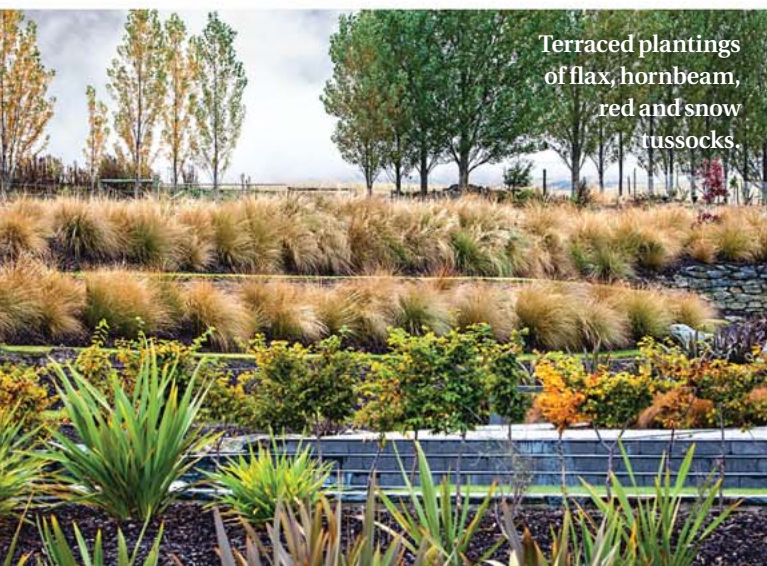




Deciduous shrubs and native grasses line the exposed aggregate drive. Shelter poplars are in the middle distance and Coronet Peak is just visible to the top left.



Schist boulders, chocolate flax and red tussock in the 'rugged creek'.



Terraced plantings of flax, hornbeam, red and snow tussocks.

rocks – occur naturally in the area. The creek, rejigged from an existing storm water catchment on the home's northern side, is dressed with Lower Shotover river stones and looks as impressive dry as in flood; low waterfalls in the curved pond at the end introduce sound and movement to the outdoor living space.

Moving towards the fences the planting becomes more sporadic, emulating the clusters of shrubs and trees long established in the wider landscape.

"We didn't want a jumble of different plants so we concentrated on big, strong single groups; one group of carex grasses, one group of flaxes," says Brooke. Each area has a designated plant; they're never mixed. "Less is definitely more. It is more effective to have a few species in big groups than a lot of individuals growing together."

His plant list, about 60 per cent of which was natives, was a mix of alpine grasses, flax and shrubs, and deciduous trees – flowering cherries for spring blossom, apples and pears for summer fruit, scarlet oaks and maples (*Acer x freemanii* 'Jeffersred') for the reddest autumn leaves. The purple-flowering lavender and hornbeam hedges – yellow in autumn, amber in winter – are classic examples of Central Otago planting.

Some plants, the cabbage trees for instance, were chosen to attract tui and other native birds. Receiving no such invitation, the rabbits came anyway. The first round of planting was a disaster. Plants that laughed in the face of cruel drought and perishing blizzard were decimated by Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail.





View towards Lake Hayes.



Plaster retaining walls.



A curved schist wall lined with hornbeam encloses manicured lawn.



Native coprosma ground cover near the front door.



Hornbeam hedge and wall reflected in the pond.



Beyond the 'Jeffersred' maples, the garden gives way to the natural landscape.

Before you could say “Mr McGregor” they’d stripped the leaves of all 380 snow tussocks. Brooke replaced the lot with good-looking golden Spaniard (*Aciphylla aurea*), too sharp and spiky even for a rabbit, and extremely drought-tolerant to boot. There was plenty more on offer though, and with a new generation of rabbits born every six weeks, more mouths to feed. Brooke’s team tried everything – poison, a rabbitier with dogs and ferrets, a rabbit-proof fence, all measures that were to the bunnies as water to a duck’s back.

They didn’t devour absolutely everything. They had a go at the red tussocks but it takes a very strong rabbit to kill one of those. They gave the flaxes and *Carex testacea* a swerve and can’t be held responsible for the hundreds of plants cooked inside their rabbit-proof plastic sleeves. In the end the garden itself rose to the occasion. Rabbits like their leaves young and succulent: a plant that is three years old holds little interest. They haven’t cleared off altogether, but the orgiastic feasting’s over and the garden looks as it did in Brooke’s head at the start.

He loves the simplicity of the planting. Favourite features are the hornbeam hedges, the massed red tussocks, the combination of chocolate flax and green, the maples and scarlet oaks in autumn. “It’s a simple, sculptural landscape that I feel proud to have been associated with,” he says. “Considering the challenges we met along the way, it’s a fantastic result, and the fact that we overcame the challenges and succeeded in spite of them makes it even more satisfying.” ❀





# THE LAZY WAY TO SAVE YOUR OWN SEED

*Why go to the hassle of gathering seed each year when you can plant self-seeders to do the work for you?*

*Lynda Hallinan shares a dozen of her favourites*

PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG





When growing unusual edible crops – such as miniature black popping corn (centre) or heirloom red-seeded broad beans (far left) – collecting and saving your own seed is an insurance policy against crop loss. However, many flowers can simply be left to their own devices and will readily self-seed.





Gathering seed to resow is one of the pleasures of end-of-season gardening, but it's not the only way to propagate plants for free. Nature often does the job more efficiently without any human intervention.





**A** rolling stone gathers no moss... and an overworked gardener gathers no seed. When you grow your own fruit and veges as well as flowers, chances are that, like me, you're already busy enough in autumn – raking leaves, blanching beans, bottling pears and saucing surplus tomatoes – to bother much with the end-of-season task of saving seed on those rare still, dry days off.

Saving seed makes economic sense, especially in the veg patch, as you can cut down your gardening costs considerably simply by shelling out rattly bean pods, squeezing the pulp of your best-tasting tomatoes onto paper towels or shaking herb seeds into paper envelopes. But even the easiest seed saving tasks take time, and in autumn I'm often preoccupied with more pressing tasks – 20kg of 'Golden Queen' peaches to preserve before the rot sets in, or five treeloads of apples to be picked – so over the last few years I've developed my own procrastinator's guide to propagation.

**I stop dead-heading, let seed pods ripen of their own accord then shake the living daylights out of them over my fine-grade pumice paths.**

Here's how it works. As soon as the last busload of garden visitors departs at the end of February, I put down my secateurs and stop dead-heading. I let annual and perennial seed pods ripen of their own accord until they're ready to let rip, then I shake the living daylights out of them, scattering seed over my fine-grade pumice paths, raised beds and any bare soil I can find. From then on, it's a waiting game. In early spring, I don't weed (much). Ahead of the spring sowing madness, I'm prepared to wait a tad longer than is advisable to start clearing the soil, because hidden in the first flush of green stubble will be scores of self-sown freebies, including many of the species I previously sowed in trays.

Self-seeding plants are the best sort because they do all the propagation work for you, saving you the hassle of collecting, drying, storing, sorting and remembering all their names.

In a small garden, you might feel a little nervous handing control back to Mother Nature, but in a large garden self-seeders are handy labour savers. The more autumn self-seeders, the fewer spring weeds – and the easiest way to learn to distinguish between the two is to let the babies breed around the corpses of their parents. So don't be in too much of a rush to tidy up in autumn.

Another option is to grab a paper bag and casually chuck in the seed pods of special plants as they ripen. Come spring, sprinkle the whole lot over a dedicated raised bed (weed it thoroughly first). It can take weeks, or months, for them all to eventually germinate, but once you know what your favourite plants look like at the tiny, true-leaf stage, you'll never look back (or accidentally hoe them out).



**Top right:** Although honesty (*Lunaria annua*) is a reliable self-sower, it's still worth taking the time to cut and dry the papery seed pods. Enjoy them indoors in dried arrangements all winter before returning them to the soil in spring. **Centre:** Once dry, the pointy pods of undeadheaded single-flowered and collerette dahlias can be peeled apart to reveal dozens of viable seeds. Save and resow in spring, after the last frosts. They'll flower in their first summer. **Right:** The multicoloured kernels of 'Painted Mountain' heirloom corn. To save corn seeds, leave the cobs on the plants until completely dry, then pick and peel back the husks to expose the kernels. Tie and hang. Check for any bugs in the husks. When seed is fully mature, you can easily twist the kernels free of the cobs.





# 12 EASY SELF-SEEDERS

to save & store... or let nature scatter

## 1 SCENTED SWEET PEAS

*Lathyrus odoratus*

I was rapt to discover how readily sweet peas set seed and self-sow. Seedlings may not be exact replicas of their fancy parents but they're always beautiful. To encourage seed formation, just stop picking them. The only problem is, once the vines start to set seed, their desire to keep flowering rapidly diminishes. I grow sweet peas up an obelisk in a half barrel. No sooner has one lot done its dash than a second (free) generation pops up to fill the vacancy.

## 2 BISHOP'S FLOWER

*Ammi majus*

Often mistaken for Queen Anne's lace, this frothy white, hardy annual is a generous self-seeder. Leave well alone for a full-on spring show, or collect and save seeds for staggered summer sowings. Great for picking and attractive to beneficial insects. Order seeds from Kings Seeds.

## 3 STRAWFLOWERS

*Xerochrysum bracteatum*

Formerly known as helichrysums, these drought-tolerant daisies are delightful dried. Start them off on a hot, dry bank and they'll do the rest, returning year after year.

## 4 BLANKET FLOWERS

*Gaillardia*

These half-hardy perennials flower in their first season from seed, and in dry summers are as tough as boots. 'Arizona Sun' is the best known of the bunch, but its new apricot and red cousins are equally amenable.

## 5 MEXICAN COSMOS

*Cosmos sulphureus*

Dazzling in late summer, this hot coloured cosmos species is a magnet for bees, butterflies and compliments from garden visitors. Get things rolling with a packet of 'Bright Eyes' (Yates), 'Kaleidoscope' (Kings Seeds), or 'Cosmic Orange' (Egmont Seeds).

## 6 SINGLE DAHLIAS

*Dahlia*

Forget those dinner-plate dahlias that dazzle on show benches. If it's continuous easy-care colour you're after, whack in single or so-called species dahlias. They grow like hormone-fuelled daisies, flower all summer long, and drop copious quantities of seed. Seedlings come up thick beneath the plants; transplant into trays to cosset them through their first winter. From Dahlia Haven.

## 7 SUMMER COSMOS

*Cosmos bipinnatus*

Given its reliable promiscuity as a self-sower, annual cosmos should probably be considered a weed. Once you've got it, you've got it for life. And that's just how I like it.

## 8 RUDBECKIAS

*All of them!*

These bold prairie daisies are one of the joys of summer. Both the annual and perennial varieties wantonly self-sow, though sometimes not until quite late in the season, so learn what their furry seedlings look like. They are great value and drought-tolerant.







## 9 GRANNY'S BONNETS

*Aquilegia vulgaris*

Because my grandmother grew them, I've always had a soft spot for these spring-flowering, self-sowing cottage charmers. However, I subsequently learned that she only grew them because she couldn't get rid of them! "Such a weed," she told me. When the court jester-like seed pods are ripe, sprinkle the seeds wherever you need a good – and pretty – gap filler.

## 10 CHINESE DELPHINIUMS

*Delphinium grandiflorum*

Sometimes described as a short-lived perennial larkspur, the gentian-blue dwarf *Delphinium grandiflorum* 'Blue Butterfly' is divine in spring but long gone by summer. Seedlings tend to get crowded out but if you cut the old stalks and lay them on open soil or gravel, you soon have a crop of free seedlings to prick out and replant.

## 11 POT MARIGOLDS

*Calendula officinalis*

Cheerful, quick to flower, frost-hardy and edible. Oh, and so benevolent. Calendulas self-sow all year round.

## 12 WHITE LACEFLOWER

*Orlaya grandiflora*

This is my all-time favourite, spring-flowering hardy annual. I started with one plant, let it set seed (to be honest, there's no stopping it) and now I have all the seedlings I could ever wish for, plus more to share. As the seedlings rarely stray far and have long tap roots that resent disturbance (transplant gently), I also collect seed so I can shift it around my garden. From Kings Seeds. ❀

To prick out my self-sown seedlings, I have a bad habit of borrowing dinner forks & spoons from our cutlery drawer



## GRAVEL PATH... OR SEED BED?

My paths are covered with fine-grade decorative pumice gravel from Daltons, which doubles as a nifty seed-raising medium. In late summer, when annuals have done their dash, they invariably bend their necks over the edges of my beds to scatter their seeds in the gravel. All I have to do is prick them out and transplant them. Another reason pumice paths make convenient seed beds is that, unlike soil in beds and borders, you rarely dig them over, giving slower-germinating perennial seedlings – from echinaceas to rudbeckias, delphiniums, scabiosas and nemesias – the chance to sprout.

*Chrysanthemum 'Snowlands'* (Yates Seeds) is a compact daisy that happily self-sows year-round. A free-flowering, hardy bedding annual that's lovely at the front of borders.





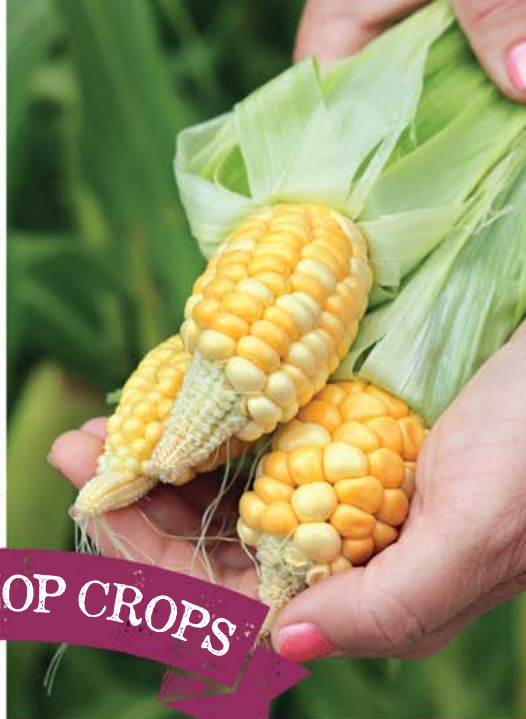
**HYDRANGEAS:** Gardening is usually considered a low-tech hobby but smartphones and digital cameras are increasingly handy for identifying plants that take your fancy while visiting other people's gardens. During the recent Heroic Garden Festival, I lost count of the number of times I was shown a digital photo and asked, "What's this plant?" (pictured) For the record, it's the double-flowered oak-leaf *Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Snowflake'. This stunning shrub has huge, elongated heads of white flowers that age from lime to rosy pink then rusty brown. The foliage is equally gorgeous – it turns deep maroon in autumn. Order from garden centres or by mail-order from Woodleigh Nursery.



# April top & flop CROPS

*Lynda's regular roundup of  
the best & worst performers  
in her Hunua garden*





## TOP & FLOP CROPS



**CARROTS:** A double success this season. Not only were my 'Senior' (Egmont Seeds) carrots enormous, they were sweet right to the core. That meant that Lucas and Lachie (above) were happy to help harvest them and, more importantly, eat them.



**'SECKEL' PEARS:** These sugar pears are the smallest commercial variety grown. They're a lovely little speckled pear that's sweet but not mushy. I was thrilled to beat the birds to them for the first time.



**DWARF BUTTER BEANS:** Every cloud has a silver (or in this case, yellow) lining. When rabbits nibbled the tops off all my bean seedlings in early summer, I overcompensated and sowed beans all over the garden, which means we're now enjoying a late flurry of my favourite vegetable. I've got 'Purple King' fruiting up flax stakes; 'Scarlet Runner' and my late Uncle John's green beans twining up string obelisks; 'White Emergo' on a tepee; speckled borlotti beans tucked in among my spring onions; green 'Top Crop' bush beans under my tomatoes; and a prolific crop of dwarf butter beans between, of all things, my peanut plants. They started cropping just in time for the first autumn rains.



**LETTUCE:** We installed a new metal gate for our chicken run, dramatically reducing nocturnal raids by feathered escapees, and radically improving our lettuce haul. The loose-leaf, frilly lime 'Frisby' (Zealandia's Grow Fresh range) was particularly good.



**CORN:** This year I harvested my worst-ever crop of sweetcorn, with small, bland, gappy cobs (pictured). Meanwhile, the corn at the supermarket was cheaper, bigger and sweeter than ever before, prompting me to grill Gordon McPhail from LeaderBrand for his top tips.

LeaderBrand grows "millions" of perfect cobs each summer. Gordon's advice? Seed variety matters. "Genetics play a big part. I've just trialled 200 varieties to find the mix of eight early, mid-season and late hybrids that we want. Matching seed to the time of year is key; if you sow an early variety too late, it won't handle the heat or taste right. In home gardens, mid-season varieties are easiest." Gordon says corn prefers heavier soil – "we grow it across the flats in Gisborne" – and nitrogen-rich fertiliser in the early part of the season, before it throws the cobs. "Corn loves nitrogen. It doesn't need lots of K (potassium) or P (phosphorus), though the latter is a good plant starter."

For large cobs, it's vital to have strong, well-established plants by the time the silks appear. Bad weather – rain or wind – during the silking phase also impacts on pollination, and leads to poorly filled cobs.

Bland kernels? Blame the sun. "Corn won't taste as good without high sunshine hours – that's why Gisborne is ideal – and a good variation between day and night temperatures. That brings the sugars up."

Small cobs are caused by a lack of food – and water. "You can't really overdo it." Though, as I can attest, you can definitely underdo it. I'll try harder next year. ❀



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IN SEASON

# berried treasure

*If our native flora seems  
a bit dowdy, take another look.  
On a tour of the country,  
Neil Ross discovers a rich vein  
of fruits valued by wildlife  
and humans alike*



The karamu's bunches of orange berries are so dense that you can often spot a heavily laden bush from the windows of a speeding coach

Last autumn was a fantastic year for fruit. It coincided with me taking a group of plant lovers from the top to the toe of New Zealand in search of all things leafy. The fruits and berries of native plants are rather like their flowers – subtle and tantalizingly tiny, but with an occasional sumptuous outburst. In fact, I had always assumed the only way to enjoy them was to leaf furtively through the almost pornographically explicit close-ups in one of those posh botanical books – anything by the likes of J T Salmon, where every detail and vibrant colour are blown up 10 to 100 times on the glossy page.

In real life, I thought, berries are much harder to find and are never as magnificent – with perhaps two exceptions. In a good year the nikau palm produces vast bunches of scarlet fruit from those lacquered trunks. The spectacle is hard to miss even for that dim-witted glutton, the native pigeon, whose sole purpose in life is to get legless by gorging on the banquet of semi-fermented fruit until its little claws can no longer support its fat frame and it totters and topples from its perch. Does this really happen? Apparently so.

The other show-off is karamu (*Coprosma robusta*). The bunches of orange berries are likewise so dense that you can often spot a heavily laden bush from the windows of a speeding coach. Unlike the nikau, this isn't really a plant

for a pretty garden. The leaves are distinctly pedestrian and the habit gangly, but I'm sure with some firm pruning a wildlife-lover could get a half-decent performance from this plant, if only to draw in the birdlife.

Contrary to expectations, my road trip proved to be berry bountiful and it made me realise just how flimsy my knowledge is of our natives. Take podocarps: I know that rimu, totara and kahikatea belong in the club, but kauri? Is it in or out? I mentioned podocarp forest in throwaway

### *Dianella nigra*

We most enjoyed this little flax-like plant on the mist-swirling paths around Rotorua's thermal attractions, though it grows throughout the land preferring partially shaded forest edges. *Dianella* berries are a kaleidoscope of inky blues, violets and paler hues. You never get quite enough to call it a spectacle and, despite the common name of New Zealand blueberry, the fruits are inedible, but the intensity of colour is a pleasure. Some good variegated forms of this plant are available if subtlety isn't your thing.

PHOTO: JENNY LILLY/GAP PHOTOS



### *Aristotelia fruticosa*

On the tussock lands below Mount Cook, we dipped in and out of tangled thickets of mountain celery pine and lacebark (*Hoheria populnea*), but also appearing in the mix were the bright, white berries of mingimingi (*Leptecophylla juniperina*), toatoa (*Haloragis erecta*) and this showy shrub, also known as mountain wineberry.



### *Gunnera prorepens*

I'm cheating a bit here, as this waterside native produces its funny spikes of spherical red fruits a bit earlier in the year. Though they are low to the ground, the effect is very dramatic for a native. Perhaps it's those bronzy, almost dreary leaves setting off the colour of the fruits so well. On drier ground, substitute this for one of the showy acaenas such as *Acaena novae-zelandiae*. The bright red colour is carried by seedheads rather than fruits but is no less impressive.





### *Beilschmiedia tawa*

At one point on our tour of New Zealand, I was supposed to be appreciating the crafts, songs and dances at the Tamaki Maori Village near Rotorua. But with their unique upward thrusting branches, the forests of tawa almost stole the show. The fruits look remarkably like plums and the seed within was traditionally roasted and eaten by Maori. This is another large seed devoured and then distributed by the kereru, or native pigeon.



### *Fuchsia procumbens*

New Zealand has both the largest and one of the smallest fuchsias in the world. As we approached Milford Sound in torrential rain the peeling trunks of the tree fuchsias (*Fuchsia excorticata*) glowed even more intense with the water varnishing their flanks. The creeping fuchsia (*Fuchsia procumbens*) is a very different beast. The flowers are a jewel box of gold, scarlet and emerald but the berries that follow are just as much of a treat. This is a versatile plant for a bank, wall top or container.

### *Aristotelia serrata*

Wineberry, or makomako, is one of the first trees to colonise a new area after fire or if a tree has fallen in the forest. This makes it an ideal revegetation species, not to mention its plentiful berries which turn from red to black and are loved by birds and humans. Pre-European settlement, Maori used them as a treat for the kids, although they are a little bitter. They were also crushed to make an appetising drink.







sentences, waving an authoritative arm to my minions on the coach as we weaved through tortuous bends where farmland suddenly ended, and then plunged into scraps of remnant bush where craggy old fir trees erupted out of normal-sized forest and reared their moss-garlanded limbs skyward. Yes, we had arrived in the hallowed halls of the podocarps, something ancient and Tolkienesque – but until now I’ve never been able to put a finger on what makes a podocarp a podocarp, and why that’s somehow a special New Zealand Gondwanaland thing.

Outside Warkworth we stopped off at a kauri reserve, one of those typical DOC areas where a stumpy bench and a bin rear their heads out of impeccably mown kikuyu, and lawn laps against the darkness of unshaven wilderness like a poodle sniffing at the legs of a Doberman. There, on the fringe, were berries in vast scarlet sheets, dripping from the branches of kahikatea at eye level. These fruits are the podocarp’s calling card, for this ancient family of conifers has eschewed the normal cone with its rattling seeds; instead, a single or sometimes double cone scale has inflated into a juicy, bird-luring lunch. Our feathered friends unwittingly consume the blue-black seed cleverly hanging off the end along with their meal and the lot is pooped out – the germinating tree providing its own supply of fertiliser. Hence the term podocarp: *podos* – the Greek for foot – meaning the seed on the end, *karpos* meaning fruit. Members of the Podocarpaceae family were endemic to the southern supercontinent Gondwanaland before it splintered into South America, India, Africa and Australia millions of years ago. These strange-berried conifers with their sickle-shaped leaves continued to evolve but the basic template had been established. Kauri by the way is a non-member – the giant cones betray it as a more everyday evergreen.

Over the generations, Maori became experts at being able to extract the edible parts of native seeds and their fruits, often going to great lengths to separate good from bad. The seeds of the beautiful coriaria (tutu) berry, for example, contain toxic poisons so Maori would strain the fruits through the flowerheads of toetoe (Cortaderia) to obtain a seed-free jelly which was then fermented into a tasty wine. The inedible flesh of the large berries of tawa and karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) was removed by boiling the fruits

for several days. The seeds were then steamed to break down the toxins and washed under running water before they would be ready to eat. Despite the effort required, these trees became highly prized and even today stands of this coastal-loving plant are found far inland, indicating where ancient tribes had their pa sites and grew berried treasures. ❀

### *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*

Kahikatea is one of our forest icons. Its form is typically a neat, dark spire – often densely jostling together in the damp lowlands where it loves to grow. This isn’t a good tree to grow in the garden as juvenile specimens look somewhat threadbare. Plant one in the wild instead and visit it over the years. Better still, plant five – that way you are more likely to get a female tree and with it the beautiful berries that used to be eaten raw by Maori on special occasions.



### *Libertias*

These classic Gondwanaland lilies crop up in South America, Australia and New Guinea, but here in New Zealand we have three beautiful species, the most dramatic of which is *Libertia peregrinans*. Creeping stolons run across the ground to make new clumps. The pure white summer flowers morph into these showy berries, which match the leaves late in the year.



### *Astelia chathamica*

As the name suggests, this hails from the Chatham Islands and is the king of the astelias even if it is too large for most small gardens. If so, the finer shore astelia (*Astelia banksii*) might be a better fit. Silver plants that do well in shade are hard to find, which is why these members of the lily family are so useful. If you provide plenty of drainage and a fairly rich soil you will be rewarded with these dramatic bunches of berries. Good native nurseries will stock most of these plants.



PLANT PROFILE



70gardener



## Xanthe White has a soft spot for puriri, the noble native that rubs along happily with all forest-dwellers

PORTRAIT: EMMA BASS

**Q** There are certain plants, like people, that just seem to be able to give a bit more to life than others and, in doing so, they become somewhat the centre of things in a nice, quiet way. I think you're one of those, puriri.

**A** Oh, I think that in another context, like the tropics, we would be rather ordinary – but plants in New Zealand do often move at a different, more temperate pace. It's only in the warmer north where we can fruit through the winter and get away with it, but this has meant we can provide food when it is otherwise scarce. One advantage of all this extra effort is that our seeds are being spread year-round. We offer nectar and fruit, and the birds do our gardening.

**Q** You are a key plant where bird populations need to be supported, but you also help to restore other native plants because the birds will spread around other species as they feed on you – is this correct?

**A** None of us are in it alone. Of course there is competition in a forest, but there is room for all. You just have to learn to adapt. You'll know of our friend, the puriri moth?

**Q** Yes, I was going to ask you: friend or foe?

**A** Well, the caterpillars that get big enough burrow into the sides of the tree and then cleverly take a downward turn in the shape of a seven. The hole heals and the caterpillar lives on the stem cells inside the tree for up to five years before taking flight as the puriri moth, our largest moth. They are very beautiful, with moss-like wings, and are important food for moreporks and kaka, our other forest friends. Their abandoned burrows are often occupied by weta and other insects. I wouldn't say this was good if you wanted a straight tree that a forestry team could harvest for timber, but it is our way of living in the forest: all are welcome. It makes for a more interesting life. More fun than being a pine forest! They are very stand-alone.

**Q** Even your seeds are not meagre. In every seed there are four embryos that can germinate at once or at different times throughout the year.

**A** Yes, we get four chances. Our flowers have four lobes and four stamen and cluster in flower groups of up to 12. We produce large amounts of nectar and by New Zealand standards our flowers are "showy", the colour varying from rose pinks to dark reds. Some trees even have white flowers, although these are rarer. The fruit varies in colour too, but is usually bright red and sometimes yellow. These are the favourite of old koreru. He's a big bird and needs to eat a lot to maintain that girth. They like the karaka, of course, but they do get drunk on too much karaka berry when it's overripe. A drunk wood pigeon can be a liability!

**Q** I can imagine! I didn't realise that puriri had been a desirable timber and that most of our puriri forests had been cleared during European settlement (pre-European Maori favoured other timbers that were easier for carving).

**A** Yes, it's a sad part of our history and you can imagine the impact it had on birds and insects as well. Low-branching puriri are a familiar sight in farm paddocks, but in a forest we actually grow into tall, proud trees. The trees that remain there now just weren't worth plundering. It also didn't help that the puriri forests were on the plush volcanic soils, which was mostly cleared for gardening and farming. The odds were against us. The durability of our timber had protected us during Maori settlement but with more modern forestry methods we were a popular alternative to walnut and shipped to America. Our timber lasts 50 years beneath ground, you know.

**Q** That's amazing. Well, I would rather plant you for the birds and life that surrounds you. From now on, I shall think of you as more of a forest village than a single tree. I bet you don't gossip but if you could....

**A** ...The secrets I could tell! ❀

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# YOUR GARDEN NOTEBOOK *this Mother's Day*

Love the garden this month with these exciting events, courses and products



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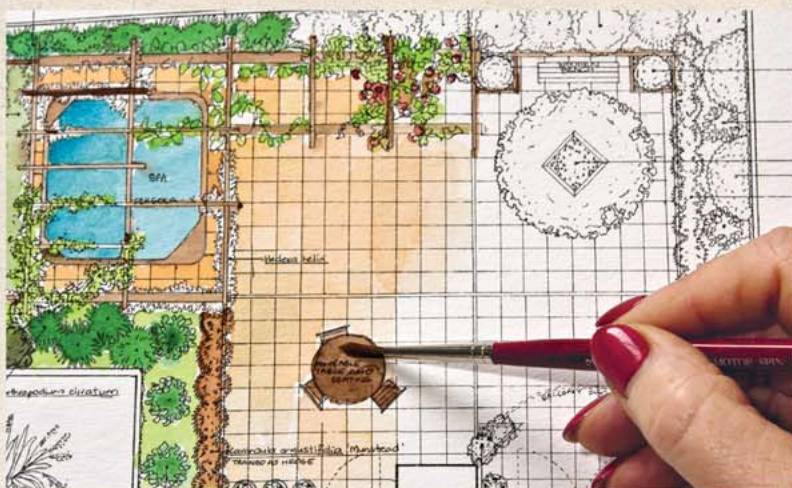
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To enrol in the May or October course, search 'short course in home garden design' at [www.unitec.ac.nz](http://www.unitec.ac.nz) or email [rdavies@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:rdavies@unitec.ac.nz) with any queries.





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MAY 2015



## YOUR BREAKFAST COULD FUEL A BREAKTHROUGH.

Many of us are affected by breast cancer. For Lorraine Downes, it was her mum's diagnosis. Fortunately hers was found early. This May, please support the New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation by hosting a Pink Ribbon Breakfast. You'll help fund critical research to save the eight New Zealand women diagnosed every day.

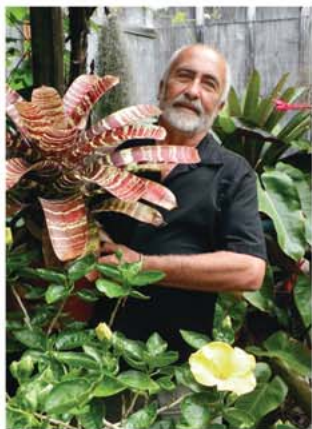
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# ✂ FROM NORTH TO SOUTH ✂



76 NORTHLAND

Evergreen foliage, Easter bunnies, autumn tidy-ups and being frost-ready – our regional experts talk about what's happening

*in April*



78 AUCKLAND



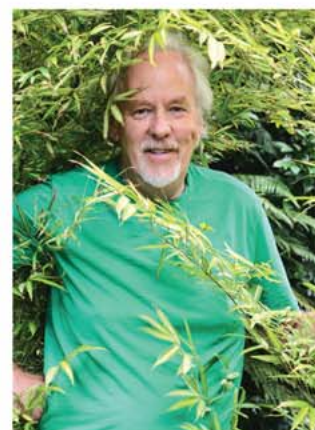
80 WAIKATO



82 TARANAKI



85 HAWKE'S BAY



86 KAPITI COAST



88 NELSON



90 AKAROA



92 DUNEDIN



94 SOUTHLAND





*Bauhinia galpinii*



*Final fling*



Autumn here is a time for strong colour. Not just the deciduous trees; it's flowering time for some of the subtropicals. Right now it's the South African red orchid bush that's demanding attention

**B**auhinia *galpinii* is often called Pride of the Cape, and deservedly so, because at this time of year it is ablaze with brilliant orange, orchid-like flowers that start in January and continue till early winter. This feisty African battler is remarkably adaptable, to the point where it can be a bushy, arching small tree in full sun, a tough groundcover on windswept hillsides or a scrambling vine that clammers through trees to reach the sun. It's a sun-lover, like the proteas and leucodendrons, and like them it thrives wherever drainage is good and frosts light. The rather leathery leaves and contour-hugging form make the red orchid bush a surprisingly happy coastal shrub as long as they can hunker down among other plants or rocks.

The vivid orange flowers are held above the arching horizontal stems, nestling among the unusual twin-lobed leaves that are a distinctive feature of all bauhinias. Its flamboyance through the autumn months brings a high-energy splash of colour when our driest season is at its height. The red orchid bush is among the hardiest of all the bauhinias and will withstand a frosty winter as long as the soil is friable and well-drained. Soggy clays and swampy soils are the worst enemy of the bauhinias, but all of mine perform well in my slightly crumbly Northland clay.

**The genus Bauhinia consists of 200 species spread throughout the tropics and sub-tropics.** Some of them are small trees up to 6m tall while others are tumbling vines or sprawling shrubs. The most dramatic flowering types tend to be the hardiest in the cool subtropics like northern New Zealand. Most notable among these is *Bauhinia*

*variegata*, the Indian orchid tree or mountain ebony. The leaves are a greyish-green and the perfumed flowers are variegated in shades of pink and a darker mauve-pink. There is also a pure white form, *Bauhinia variegata* 'Candida', and another strain with deep magenta flowers. *Bauhinia variegata* blooms in spring, which is the dry season in the tropics when the leaves drop to reveal the spectacular floral display. Here in New Zealand, of course, our spring is never dry so the leaves drop spasmodically or not at all, and the flowers are sometimes partly hidden among the leaves.

**In India and Pakistan the leaves, buds, flowers, young seed pods and ripe seeds of *Bauhinia variegata* (and several other bauhinia) have been used medicinally and as food for centuries.** Laboratory testing has recently confirmed that they contain compounds with anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties in the liver.

The Hong Kong orchid tree, *Bauhinia blakeana*, is a hybrid between *Bauhinia variegata* and *Bauhinia purpurea* and is the national symbol of Hong Kong, in the same way as the silver fern is in New Zealand. Its leaves and flowers are larger than those of the parent plants and it is an extremely popular flowering tree throughout the tropics. It flowers in New Zealand from March until November then drops its leaves over summer. This one has proven very tricky to propagate here, but once growing is very hardy, handsome and robust.

Bauhinias are a diverse lot but the most spectacular species are also the hardiest in cooler climes like ours. And right now the flame red of *Bauhinia galpinii* is holding centre stage till winter comes. ❀



*Bauhinia blakeana*



*Bauhinia variegata* 'Candida'



*Bauhinia variegata*





# EGGS FACTOR





Since it is Easter early this month, I am going to raise the controversial subject of eggs and gardening, more specifically the shells of eggs and the use thereof in your vegetable patch



**Y**ou might wonder quite how controversial eggshells can be. Well, all I can say is the topic was the catalyst for what nearly became a stand-up row when I was speaking at a garden club once. I was rabbiting on happily about gardening, when someone asked me for tips on defeating slugs and snails. So I passed on a few that I have found useful (briefly: digital control, aka going on a slugfari at night and picking them off works, as does slug bait, but I prefer to use the ones that are pet- and bird-safe). One of the members raised her hand and said surrounding plants with broken pieces of eggshell also deterred these unwelcome gastropoda. I said it didn't. She said it did. I said *NZ Gardener* had run tests to prove or disprove whether eggshells deterred slugs and snails (and reported the results in October 2011) and, according to our observations, it didn't work. She said she had used this technique in her own garden for many years and according to her observations, it did work. I said we could agree to disagree; but she seemed keen to continue to disagree instead. So I moved on to another topic (keeping cats out) which I knew would distract the crowd and ignored her ever-waving hand thereafter. (If you are interested in deterring cats – and in my experience, all gardeners are – then plant intensively to minimise bare soil, or invest in a water pistol and lie in wait whenever there's nothing on TV. An unexpected dousing may or may not deter moggies but it certainly relieves your own feelings.)

### **The theory is, eggshells have sharp edges that slugs don't like.**

They won't drag their soft bodies over broken up pieces of shell for fear of getting cut. Sorry, believers, but I don't buy it. I do believe diatomaceous earth stops snails and slugs, but that's made of silicon dioxide, which is basically glass. Plus, when it's dry, diatomaceous earth is a desiccant, so it absorbs moisture, sucking the slime from the slug and causing it to dehydrate. Whereas eggshells are made of calcium, which has a chalky texture (as in, you can actually make your own chalk from eggshells). In our experiments, slugs and snails slid happily over a barrier of broken eggshells, and in tests run by an American university, slugs and snails were actually attracted to the eggshell if there was any vestigial trace of eggy protein remaining on it.

### **I am not saying that eggshells cannot be useful in the garden.**

A study by the University of Minnesota's Department of Horticultural Science has verified that crushing a few shells and mixing them into the soil before you plant a tomato helps prevent blossom end rot, which partly caused by a lack of calcium. (The mineral strengthens the cell walls inside the fruit.) To apply to tomatoes that are already planted, make a tea by crushing 12 eggshells in 1 litre of water and leave overnight. Just be aware that an inconsistent watering regime is a major cause of blossom end rot too, and eggshells alone will not prevent it.

### **Use the eggy water on your African violets too, to ramp up the colour.**

Or save the water in which you've boiled eggs, let it cool down, and use that. The calcium that leaches from the shells will give the blooms an almost fluorescent glow, and it will encourage a sulking plant to rebloom.

### **I often get asked if eggshells can go in compost. I chuck 'em in mine.**

I believe that over time – admittedly over years, rather than a season or two – they will help build up the calcium in your soil; and eggshells contain trace amounts of zinc, iron, manganese, copper, sodium and potassium too. People often suggest leaving them out of compost because they take so long to break down, and will still be recognisable when everything else is a rich, crumbly tilth. If that bothers you, dry them in the oven and crush them before adding to your heap or bin. I called Rodney Dunn from Just Add Worms to ask if he added the shells from the eggs laid by his 30 hens to his five bathtub worm farms, and he said he did all the time with no problem at all, although the worms take a while to break them down and you can still see pieces of shell in the vermicompost. His best tip, though, was to feed worms egg cartons! Ideally, he says, their diet should be 50 per cent nitrogen-rich material (fruit and veg scraps, aged lawn clippings and green waste) and 50 per cent carbon-rich cardboard, newspaper and egg cartons. Just soak the paper and cardboard with your hose before adding. ❀





Plane trees, left, provide frost protection but also kept heat-loving plants cool in summer so they've been pruned hard to let in the summer sun.



# BE PREPARED

I'm ready for climate change – whichever way she goes. On a steep and cold south-east bank I have a potential grove of *Acer accharum*, for maple sugar. I can't harvest their sap unless I get really cold night temperatures, but they should be stunning in autumn

If the changes are more tropical, I have a banana grove, several avocado trees, a tropical apricot, a pomegranate, three passionfruit, two jaboticabas and a Mexican lime. I am trying to add a couple of macadamia, a kaffir and a date plum to that but previous efforts have succumbed to our current Waikato winters.

Over the years, however, I have learnt that some frost-prevention methods work better than others, and if you can just get them through the first couple of winters, they get established enough, hardy enough, and high enough to survive the three or four hard frosts we get each year.

**I can't emphasise this enough: the first consideration should be your choice of variety.**

Some varieties are much more cold-tolerant than others. This is apparent with the banana I call Te Uke, appropriated

from the banks of the Whanganui River, which not only keeps its leaves later into winter, but also bursts out first in spring, compared to the other supposedly cold-tolerant bananas growing alongside. Rootstocks – such as the trifoliata commonly used for citrus – can also increase a plant's cold tolerance.

**Management is another factor: new soft growth is much more susceptible to frost.** For this reason withhold nitrogen in autumn – it will just encourage new tender growth. Fertilise instead with phosphorous and calcium to encourage stronger cells. Seaweed extract is a good strengthening fertiliser. The damaging ice crystals form more readily around bacteria, so a cleansing copper spray in autumn is also beneficial.

You can even buy some sprays (including a biodynamic one) that claim to





Unwieldy, ineffective bubble-wrap.



Hardy Te Uke banana.

add a level of frost protection. I can't say that I have had much success with these... but possibly because I did not follow the routine recommended!

### Also consider the position: every garden has varying microclimates.

Obviously the north side of the house, tree or garden is going to get a lot more sun and be warmer as a consequence. But water-tanks, concrete or stone retaining walls, ponds and pools, brick house walls also act as heat sinks, absorbing heat during the day and releasing it at night.

Bear in mind also that cold air sinks; so it will drain to the bottom of a slope. The difference in temperature between the top and the bottom can be substantial. Make sure the cold can flow down and away by ensuring there are air drainage passages – a fence, shed or a dense planting will trap the cold. Plant trees needing winter chill (apricots and cherries) at the bottom of the slope with frost-tender plants nearer the top.

Mature plants with overhanging branches trap the rising warm air and can nurture small frost-tender plants. Get up early on a frosty morning to walk around your garden and notice where the frost is.

**Over the years I have tried a lot of ways to beat nature.** Frost cloth is supposed to be opened during the day so the sun can warm the plant and ground, and closed at night to trap the heat. But who remembers to do that every day?

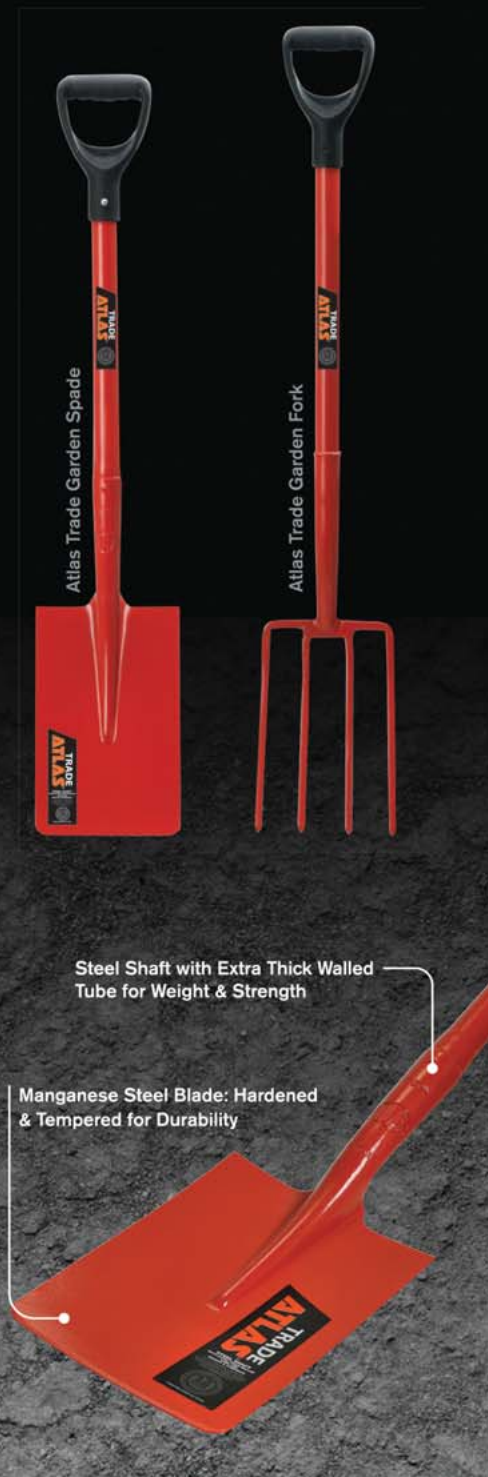
Bubblewrap, I thought, was a clever solution, creating an individual mini-glasshouse. My plants didn't share my enthusiasm for that idea. So the best I have found is a cross between a portable heat sink and the insulation they used in England 100 years ago. Since my husband is a mechanic, I have access to 20-litre containers of oil (I dare say containers of water would serve just as well). These are placed around susceptible trees each autumn, two on the south side, as close to the trunk as I can get them. Over them and around the tree is thrown the straw from the duck's nesting boxes. The way this works is the oil warms up during the day, and holds enough heat to keep the area insulated by the straw frost-free during the early morning chill. The straw allows air and moisture to circulate around the plant and naturally turns to mulch in the spring. This method has allowed me to nurse bananas, avocados, limes and citrus up to waist height; after that, they are above the worst of the cold and on their own.

**Gardeners are often advised to have bare ground around frost-tender plants.** Bare ground radiates heat, which helps with the warming process. But I disagree with this as many frost-tender plants are also susceptible to changes in root temperature. I believe this unnatural cooling of the earth by exposure to be detrimental to the overall strength of the plant, and instead I mulch, mulch and mulch to insulate. ❀

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# Small wonder

Gardening is as driven by fashion and trends as are other pursuits. It was vireya rhododendrons that brought this to mind. In the 1990s, they were a hot ticket item.



**B**ecause they are easy to propagate, the market was then saturated with small plants surrounded by big hype and an endless stream of new varieties unleashed on an eager buying public. The luscious-looking ones with heavy, felted foliage and big, fragrant trumpets were the most sought after. Here was tropicalia at home even though New Zealand does not have a tropical climate.

Back then, we had a commercial nursery and vireyas were one of our big lines. We produced thousands of them every year and Mark had a full-scale breeding programme running on them, naming new cultivars at a cracking rate. They were one of the easiest lines to propagate with the highest success rate from cuttings, taking half the time to get to a large grade as the hardy rhododendrons and camellias.

### It was all downhill from then on.

They needed the most intensive spray programme of any plant we produced and even so, there was a high death rate before we got them to the market. They are vulnerable to almost every disease going, they have pathetically small root systems to support quite abundant top growth, they are frost tender and needed full-scale frost protection in commercial production – even under shade cloth – and they can die almost overnight.

I recall the odd visitor to our garden asking the names of certain plants and Mark would toss off that it was a *Vireya* 'Wiltanddieonyou'. Because so many did just that – wilt and die. The species were particularly touchy to grow, as were the big, luscious hybrids that everyone wanted.

### But we would not be without them here in our garden in Taranaki.

If you have enough vireyas, you can guarantee that there will be one in flower all year round. They don't get large. They fit in well to subtropical woodland conditions and they don't need a whole lot of attention. We accept that some will suddenly die, even after many years and we don't expect every plant to thrive. Those that we do manage to keep alive here, make a worthwhile contribution.



'Pink Jazz'



An Os Blumhardt seedling.



A *Rhododendron konorii* seedling.



Wounding a vireya cutting.

Because vireyas originate from near the equator where day and night length remains pretty even all year round, their flowering is not triggered by changes in day length. This is why they tend to flower randomly and for long periods, at times for months although we get the best show in autumn and spring, basically from this month on. With our free-draining volcanic soils, we just grow them in the ground.

Common wisdom, particularly in Auckland, was that vireyas are epiphytic so best grown either as an epiphyte on established trees or in containers with their roots tightly confined. Ponga pots used to be rage, maybe still are in some circles. While it is true that in the wild many species are epiphytic, the vast majority sold here are modern hybrids with a distant connection at best. What they want is excellent drainage without getting too dry. Only hard frost will kill a vireya faster than wet roots in a heavy, clay soil. If you have the roots heavily confined, they can dry out and start to look hard done by and scruffy.

**These days, we rank ongoing survival, good bushy growth** and an abundance of bloom above all else – often features of the smaller-flowered cultivars. These are the ones standing the test of time. Our oldest vireya is the plant of *Rhododendron macgregoriae* that Mark's father, Felix Jury, brought back from New Guinea in 1957, kickstarting the breeding programme. Astonishingly, it is still alive and healthy when many others have fallen by the wayside.

### Vireyas can root from cuttings without special equipment.

You need to use green stems that are firm, not floppy. Cut off a sliver (called "wounding") on two sides of the stem of the cutting, extending for 2-3cm. Unlike most plants, the roots will form from the wound or callus, which is why you want two to get a balanced root system. Cut the leaves in half to reduce water loss and stick in potting mix. Keep the pot in shaded conditions until roots start to form – usually within about six weeks. ❀





# Blind and fighting for her life

There is nothing sporting about bear baiting.

Tied up, savagely attacked, bitten and mauled, all the time terrified and unable to defend herself, completely blind with no idea where the next horrific dog attack would come from.

Throughout Pakistan there are many bears like Chowti, snatched as a cub and brutally exploited in the cruel 'blood sport' of bear baiting.

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falling out. Within the week he was bald. He resembled a Mini-Me of Dr Evil's cat, Mr Whiskers. All that remained was a bald body and furry feet – he looked like he was wearing Ugg boots. What was so alarming was that through his soft baby skin you could see all his tiny red veins. It was almost like viewing one of those see-through fish you see in pet shops or aquariums. I could almost see what he had for lunch!

So now not only was he tiny but he was also as bald as a badger. Perhaps he was working on a new spin on the saying "buck naked"! My neighbours rudely suggested I should try covering him in some Regaine hair loss solution!

**It is amazing what you can fashion out of a small child's sock.** With a family of three boys, I have a drawer full of mismatched socks – I seem to have one of those washing machines that eats them up. I regularly will wash a pair and only end up with one remaining.

I was getting concerned, however, about heat loss and sunburn for my nude bunny. This Hawke's Bay sun can be merciless on anyone's skin, let alone that of an albino. The boys chose a black sock with white stripes as they thought he would look good as a mascot for the All Blacks. I created the latest in Milan fashion for rabbits! After cutting the toe off the sock and forming two openings for his front legs, our little runty was soon cat-walking in front of his littermates, looking very *Vogue*-ish.

**A search on Mr Google left me no wiser as to why this little guy had decided to go bald** but I was interested to discover that over the next couple of weeks his hair began to grow back to its original lovely, soft, plush texture just like his Rex breed siblings. Now that he is three months old, he has caught up in size with his litter mates. Frankly it is now very hard to pick him apart from the others – except when you have an armful of fresh greens, as he is still the first to come bounding up to get the best tidbits. The kids still call him Runty Richie McCaw, but he doesn't really suit that description any more. 🌱

# THE WEE ONE

Everyone loves a runt! At least I think they should. I fail miserably as an urban farmer as I can't cull any small runts when one comes along

**M**y doe rabbits all have healthy sized litters of baby rabbits whenever they breed.

A litter of eight or nine is very normal. Occasionally some of the mums will give birth to 12 rabbits. Often with these large litters there seems to be a runt, one that is much smaller than its brothers and sisters. Runts, I think, are caused by the developing embryo not getting adequate nutrition *in utero*. I find this interesting as the ones I have known are often the pluckiest, most intelligent and fearless of the litter. They are always the ones that manage to get the warmest place in the nest, right in the middle, at the bottom. They are often first to the food, jumping in the bowl as they are the only ones that fit, and the first to steal under mum for a quick milkshake when she is not looking!

**In the last litter that my doe Patch gave birth to, we had a runt.**

He was one of nine so it was certainly a big litter. From day one he was less than half the size of his litter mates. With these cases I am always expecting to find this tiny bunny, cold and dead on the floor when I check them all first thing each morning. Luckily, though, this little bunny refused to die. In fact he was the pluckiest and cutest little thing, first to come running up for food, happily sleeping on his mum's back and scrambling over siblings to get the prime spot for a nap.

When he was two weeks old and his eyes had just opened, a crazy thing started to happen. Alopecia came to visit him. Slowly, over a week, he developed bald spots as his fur began





*Colocasia 'Blue Hawaii'*  
is positioned to receive four  
hours of morning sun, then  
shade in the afternoon.

# Follow the light





Neoregelias'



Alstroemeria 'Inticancha Sunlight'



Red banana and Cercis 'Forest Pansy'

Some avoid alstroemerias like the plague, firmly believing they are likely to spread far and wide, and prove hard to eliminate

**A**n elderly, English gardening friend used to describe them as "more invasive than Hitler." But there are lots of new, well-mannered alstroemerias that form modest clumps and flower with an astonishing profusion, from spring to autumn. At the start of summer I planted the dwarf variety 'Inticancha Sunlight' at the front of a sunny border. I'd been enchanted by the short-stemmed flowers when I spotted it in the garden centre but did wonder if they would continue to be produced so effectively. I needn't have worried; the flowers didn't stop over summer and still show little sign of slowing. The colour looks enchanting in front of *Salvia patens* 'Blue Angel', another all-summer-and-into-autumn performer providing the old flowers are nipped off before the plant gets distracted by the need to set seed.

Another plus about the alstroemeria is that it's pretty good at tolerating a dry summer. No doubt it would also make a good container plant, but I reckon it looks best in the garden where it's such a good mixer with other summer flowers.

### Translucent foliage is an aspect of gardening that is often overlooked.

Leaves the light shines through, positioned so the early or late sun strikes them at an angle, can be one of the garden's special pleasures. Some of the best in my garden are the red bananas (*Musa ensata* 'Maurelii'), *Canna* 'Tropicanna' and

*Cercis* 'Forest Pansy', the latter a gorgeous deciduous tree with deep burgundy-red foliage from late spring to the end of autumn. It's an American native that does well in New Zealand; a group of well-travelled American horticulturists who visited in summer remarked that the colour of 'Forest Pansy' foliage is better here than in any other country. Another reason to treasure this special small tree.

### Colocasia 'Blue Hawaii' was another all-summer-and-into-autumn delight.

I wasn't mad about this new ornamental taro variety to begin with, but it improves with age and after planting out in spring – I'd kept mine in pots over winter as I wasn't sure about their hardiness – they became a highlight of the perennial border by midsummer. My plants are positioned to receive around four hours of morning sun in summer, then afternoon shade, which may explain their beautiful foliage. They should be fine in full sun too, but as I've not seen this plant in other gardens as yet I really don't know. They are in about the richest and most moisture-retentive part of the garden, which explains their success too.

These colocasias are expert water catchers, big drops gathering in the curve of the leaves and remaining there for a while. When they gleam in the sunlight they are like a magnet for young garden visitors. A friend's granddaughter lingered

over one of these magical drops for ages, contemplating drinking it, but lost courage when the thought occurred that there could be mosquito larvae present. So how hardy are these colocasias? Not enormously so, but in mild areas they seem untroubled by being in the ground all year. If there's any doubt, they should be potted up in late autumn and kept in a sheltered spot until it feels like summer has arrived.

### I once heard NZ Gardener writer Neil Ross describe bromeliads as the new perennials for mild climate

gardens. How true. Their big advantage is the ease with which they can be moved about the garden. This was a blessing when I changed the old planting at the south-facing front of the house recently. The row of clivias that were planted when we moved into the house more than three decades ago had grown dense and wide and were taking up far too much of the path. So out they went and in their place I moved in some well-established *Vriesea* 'Dark Knight' bromeliads as the focal points with lower growing neoregelias to fill the gaps between. The neoregelias made a great welcoming note at the front door beside the steps and in a big pot. Neoregelias are superb for brightening up shady spots, and are perfectly suited for long, hot summers such as we had this year, getting by happily with just a splash of water every now and again. 🌿

● **Availability:** Alstroemeria 'Inticancha Sunlight' from garden centres. Red foliage banana and Colocasia 'Blue Hawaii' from Gus Evans Nursery, Waikanae. Neoregelias from Trade Me.





# FOR THE RECORD

For the past 10 years we've been planting fruit trees and I've kept a little notebook with scribbles to remind me what was planted where and when. The trouble is, my plot is bigger than my page...







Heather's old (left) and new, improved home orchard journals.

**W**e gardeners are buggers for planting more trees, moving them and even killing them. So much so that my poor notebook now resembles a crossword puzzle in a doctor's waiting room, completed by 10 different people. I know I'm not alone: not a day goes by that someone doesn't contact Country Trading Co. with a query that could be answered by keeping a home orchard journal. If I knew 10 years ago what I know now, I'd have organised it around the stars of the show: the fruit trees themselves. It is the history, successes and failures of each of them that interests me now.

### So I've made an orchard journal template that records the following:

- **The tree's name.** Physical name-tag systems invariably fade, fall off or the wire cuts the branches as the tree grows. A tree's name is important if you want to propagate from it or know if it has a pollinator.
- **The tree's history.** Once you know the variety, you can discover its origins, parentage, who bred it and where. I love knowing that one of my apple trees was discovered as a seedling growing out of a wall in Somerset, England around 1800.
- **The rootstock.** Is your tree grafted onto a rootstock, or growing on its own roots. If it is a rootstock what is it? Keeping records helps you identify the ones that do well in your location.
- **Necessary pollinators.** Is your tree self-fertile or does it need a pollinator and, if so, which one? Some trees have pollinating partners grafted onto them as a second variety – handy to know, come pruning time!

- **The planting date.** Keep track of your tree's birthday. Knowing how old a tree is helps you plan its successors and do a bit of "ground pruning". Black passionfruit and tamarillo might give you five good seasons; plums and blackcurrants can go 50 years, easily.

- **The tree's location.** Orchards change, and it struck me that nobody uses maps now – we look at our phones. So I'm going to record location coordinates in my orchard journal using a GPS app. I have no idea how, but doesn't it sound good?

- **The tree's description.** Is it an upright, prolific, six-metre whopper or a low-spreading miniature? Is the fruit lip-puckeringly bitter unless totally tree-ripened? Does it keep long after harvest? Is it huge or tiny? You may know all this already, but it is useful info for others looking to grow this variety.

- **The flowering date.** If you have a tree that has consistently not set fruit and you know you've got the pollination sorted, check the records to see if the blossom is arriving when it's too cold for the bees to work or getting damaged by early or late frosts.

- **The ripening date of the fruit.** It will help you plan when to look out for it in subsequent years. There is nothing more frustrating than trotting down to the far corner of the property only to be greeted by an empty tree with a thick hem of poohed-out plum pips on the grass all around it.

- **Pruning notes.** If you are so inclined, recording the time you pruned each tree will help you discover the best time to do it for a given tree, together with what to take off and what to leave on.

- **Harvest records.** Over the years this can be helpful if a tree crops heavily every second year or is a consistent cropper and – if this information is important to you – how much fruit you harvested. It might also show that some trees do better in dry, hot summers or when you've had a cold winter.

- **Leave space for notes.** You will want to ensure there's room for the miscellany of other things you might want to record, such as a bad case of pear slug or blight, wind damage, or grafts taken. If you undertake a regular spraying programme, you could detail it here.

- **Include photos.** Wouldn't it be satisfying in 20 or 30 years to look back at a photo of that bright little thing, full of energy and purpose, that has now turned into a graceful old lady of the orchard? I'm talking about the tree, not the gardener!

### At the beginning of the year I started off my new home orchard

journal and it will have 130 entries on the first pass! It may take some time. Here is a look at the entry I've done for the casimiroa tree (pictured above). If you'd like to tidy up your own orchard records visit [blog.countrytrading.com](http://blog.countrytrading.com) and search for Orchard Journal to download a free copy of my template.

Let us know how you get on with it. Perhaps if enough of us fill it in, we could put the entries together into some form of book about home orchards across New Zealand? Or better still, if we all publish the GPS coordinates of our orchards, we could have an interactive map of home orchard journals across the world! ❖





'Slater's Crimson China'

# China town

I am often asked to identify a rose but unless the rose has definite, identifiable characteristics, I don't risk naming it

I've seen too many roses wrongly named, because they are judged only by the flower without considering the foliage, the canes or habit of growth. But when a friend brought me a red rose the other day, I could sound knowledgeable at last. I knew immediately it was 'Slater's Crimson China', a rose said to have been brought to Akaroa by Bishop Pompallier on one of his visits in the early 1800s. It certainly arrived with the early missionaries, and has charmed its way here and there in the village ever since.

I'm very fond of *Rosa chinensis*, which is simply a botanical term for roses with Chinese blood. Most of them aren't perfumed, many-petalled or spectacular, but they do have other endearing qualities. The bushes are inclined to be twiggy and airy with few thorns and are easy to manage, the little pointed leaves

are shiny and not prone to diseases and, given a warm spot, they flower forever without being fussed over. There comes a time in every gardener's life when they would happily swap their temperamental beauties for roses like these.

## In February I listened to visiting Italian author Andrea di Robilant

speak to Heritage Rose Society members about his latest book, *Chasing the Rose: An Adventure in the Venetian Countryside*. It describes his search for a pink rose that smelled of peaches and raspberries and grew on the estate of a maternal ancestor from the time of Napoleon. Along the way he met many rose growers but the one I remember most vividly grew only China roses, masses of every variety. "I was attracted by their lack of pretense," she said, and I know what she means.

It's hard to believe that there were no repeat-flowering roses and no true yellow roses in the Western world until plant hunters began bringing them back from China in the late 18th century. Before then, roses bloomed only once in spring in shades of pink, purple or white. The Chinese roses brought with them two important genes: the yellow gene and the recurrent-flowering gene. Once the hybridists got to work, gardeners – usually wealthy landowners – could have roses that flowered all summer, and in various shades of yellow. This was a truly earth-shattering event for gardeners and it must have made an enormous difference to the popularity of the rose.

Four Chinese roses were primarily used for breeding and became known as the stud Chinas. Although some have been lost and found a few times, we can still grow at least three of them and hold a piece of history in our hands. 'Slater's Crimson China' arrived in England in 1792, imported by Gilbert Slater, a wealthy plant collector with a Georgian house and a big garden to fill. The flowers are medium-sized doubles often flecked with white but it was the rich dark-crimson colour, charmingly referred to as "pigeon's blood", that caused a sensation. (I've looked hard at the rose and there is a macabre depth to the colour in parts.) It has the honour of leaving traces of its own blood in many of today's best red roses, and in our gardens it's an endearing twiggy bush that doesn't ask much of us and seems to never stop blooming. It's nice in a vase too.

## In 1989 I planted 'Old Blush' to climb a warm wall of my cottage,

the very first rose in my garden and my all-time favourite. Although it probably came from a Canton nursery, it was first noticed in England in 1793 blooming in the garden of a Mr Parsons and was sold as 'Parson's Pink China'. Somewhere along the way the silvery-pink rose became 'Old Blush' and it is a joy in anyone's garden. It's pleasantly double, the colour can vary from deep pink to silvery pink, and it has an indefinable charm. Give it a warm spot and it will flower from early spring into (and sometimes through) winter. Although there is said to be a bush and a climber, my bush rose climbed neatly to about 3m. Prune all China roses gently,



mainly taking out dead and spindly wood. Mine was pruned down to the rootstock which proceeded to grow, so I lost her last year. In her place, the modern climber 'Rosy Mantle' is queenly and beautiful but will be higher maintenance, I fear.

### John Dampier Parks was a young gardener for the Earl of Arran

when he was sent to China in 1823 to collect plants for the Royal Horticultural Society. He did this very successfully, bringing back chrysanthemums, orchids, camellias and more, including a climbing rose with big cupped flowers full of soft yellow, crumpled petals that became 'Parks' Yellow Tea Scented China'. Breeders used this rose to introduce yellow into Tea roses.

The fourth stud China, and probably the only one not in commerce today, is 'Hume's Blush' – although these old roses seem to come and go and when lost in one country they pop up in another. Sir Abraham Hume was a wealthy plant enthusiast and a director of the East India Company, which enabled him to acquire plants from exotic places. Introduced in 1809, 'Hume's Blush' is said to have survived the voyage to England on the open deck of a sailing ship during the Napoleonic wars. Although I've never seen it, I'm glad it did, for it looks to be a beautiful rose. A shrub climber full of soft creamy petals tinted pink, it has the distinction of being the first Tea rose introduced to the West from China.

### A large handful of more recent *Rosa chinensis* varieties are available today.

'Cécile Brünner', the old pink sweetheart rose with beautiful buds, is currently negotiating the roof of my cottage, while her apricot sister 'Perle d'Or' is content to remain a bush. My 'Comtesse du Cayla' is an ongoing delight with her flame-coloured flowers, and has grown into a very large bush. The shrub-climber 'Mutabilis' should be in everyone's garden for the pleasure of watching its big butterfly flowers open honey-coloured, turning through bronzy pink to deepest rose in the sun.

'Sophie's Perpetual' is a well-named charmer with silvery pink flowers, double and cupped, glossy deep-green foliage and smooth, thornless canes. 'Irene Watts' is strikingly pretty with long apricot



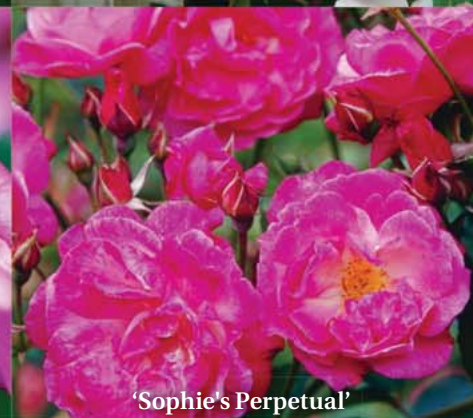
'Old Blush'



'Cécile Brünner'



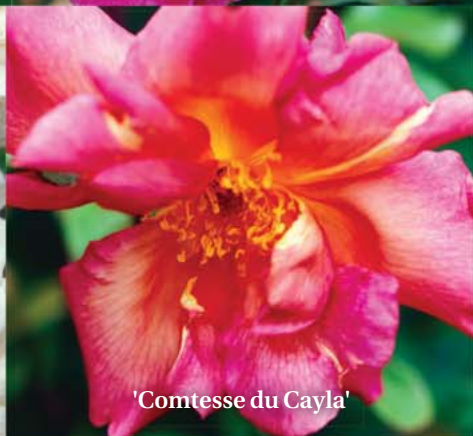
'Mutabilis'



'Sophie's Perpetual'



'Perle d'Or'



'Comtesse du Cayla'

buds opening to layers of pale-pink petals around a button eye. The bush is hardy, remains small and twiggy, and flowers forever, so is ideal for a container.

### When it comes to work in the flower garden this month

most of us will be deciding whether to carry on with the big autumn clean-up or to leave it all until the big spring clean-up is due. Christopher Lloyd, the great English writer and gardener, advised leaving it until spring so that all sorts of composting could be going on in the debris of dead leaves and plants. It may not look pretty, but it makes sense to me.

It is, however, a good time to take rose cuttings and dream of flowery bushes for free. Choose a healthy branch that has flowered and take cuttings from the mid section, making sure they are roughly the

length of a pencil and have three or more growth nodes. Thin cuttings from naturally twiggy roses like Chinas are fine if they have sufficient growth nodes.

Take more than you need and remove the leaves. At this point, it is helpful to let them stand for a few hours or overnight in willow water (chopped up willow leaves in water) or an aspirin dissolved in water. Plant them firmly, heeling them in close in a little trench in the vegetable garden or around the dripline of a rose bush, and don't let them dry out. Of course you can plant them in pots in a mixture of sand and potting mix but I have had more success with the method above. Some roses grow easily from cuttings, others don't, so it's not our fault if our cuttings remain sticks! ❀

Aside from 'Hume's Blush', all roses listed are available from rose nurseries.







# White magic

It was April: delegates from the New Zealand Gardens Trust were here for a conference; Larnach Castle Garden was on the agenda

**S**o many visitors with gorgeous gardens of their own; and the assessors, many with degrees in landscape architecture. Oh my! What a challenge, just when the growing season is winding down in the seasonal south. Even though the Larnach Castle Garden is about structure, sharp-edged hedges and ancient trees, the call of the bellbird, dry stone walls, history and ambience, I wanted more for the visitors: the frisson of flowers.

Cloudy blue-grey mounds of asters were hanging in with aconites of lapis-lazuli blue. Keith Hammett's dahlias were absolutely marvellous, as they had been for months, and so tall. Then on the day, for the first time, the rare, immaculate white lapageria flowered. Red lapageria were flowering in full flight too, on lusty plants I'd put in long ago.

## **Lapageria rosea is commonly known as Chilean bell flower.**

It is named for Napoleon's Empress, Joséphine de la Pagerie, and is native to the temperate lowland rainforests of southern Chile around Valdivia, where the locals call it copihue, and is highly esteemed as the Chilean national flower. In terms of habit, it is an evergreen twining climber to 10m with hanging, bell-shaped flowers to 10cm long. These have six waxen tepals, usually rose red spotted with white inside the flower. There are pink forms too. A picotee variety has white flowers flushed with delicate pink and a red edging. It was this variety that I acquired from Denis Hughes of Blue Mountain Nurseries in Tapanui, West Otago, who had imported some plants at great expense. (Not all of them survived the long journey from England either.)

**Lapageria plants prefer a free-draining, moist, leafy soil that is neutral or slightly acid.** Don't let it

dry out. Plant with its roots in shade but the top will take some sun. In its native Chile it is pollinated by hummingbirds. Two different strains are required for fertilisation and if you want to have seed here, where we obviously don't have humming birds, you have to pollinate it yourself. Take the pollen from the anthers of one plant and brush it onto the stigma of another. The resulting fruit is edible, but if you would rather sow the seeds, sow them fresh while they are still moist. Keep them moist in the shade of a cool greenhouse.

I sowed seeds separately into tubes two years ago. The first year they sent up a little leaf. This season stems were forming; that was until a great fat slug ate most of them. Seedlings take some years to flower. I suspect that lapageria plants begin to flower on stems once they hang down. Special coloured forms of lapageria are propagated by layering into a pot.

Lapageria and the January flowering philesia belong to the same family, philesiaceae, and have a curious relative, *Luzuriaga radicans*. Also from Chile, this is a scandent plant with clusters of dainty six-petalled white flowers during summer which are followed by little red fruit. I thought it was just a ground cover and planted it in the humid conditions of the rainforest garden, where it then grew up and furnished the trunk of the mountain cabbage tree, *Cordyline indivisa*. It's a permanent yet lovely reminder that plants just do what they want, don't they? ❀

• To buy: email: [chris@bmn.co.nz](mailto:chris@bmn.co.nz) at Blue Mountain Nurseries, Tapanui.



Getting ready for the visitors.



White lapageria



Luzuriaga on cordyline





I like big leaves; great, green elephant ears, juicy-stemmed parasols and chlorophyll-filled sails of leaves that arch overhead

**T**hose leaves excite me into believing I'm somewhere other than south of almost everywhere. They're tropical in form and style; Mediterranean perhaps, jungly probably. I've stationed the plants with the big shade-makers throughout my garden, so I can scoot from one clump to another when the sun is high, without putting on a hat for fear of sunburn. The giant rhubarb-that-is-not-rhubarb, *Gunnera tinctoria* is the most impressive of my giants and though it's disliked by council pest-plant people, I justify its inclusion in my garden by removing every seed head that erupts from its spiky heart. Those leaves are epic, and on occasion, I carry one aloft as I stalk about my garden, so as to impress visitors. They swoon, I think, as I swagger.

**I wave the huge leaves of burdock too, when I want to impress.**

Arctium produces massive leaves when grown in my garden, and at pace! They're another plant I de-seed, or de-burr, to save the irritation of becoming the stuck-to in the velcro relationship that burdock was the inspiration for. The Madeira giant black parsley, *Melanoselinum decipiens* doesn't provide quite the same protection from the sun as the other biggies, but its flowers attract hoverflies like few others can. As one of its alternative names, non-stinging hogweed, suggests it doesn't contain burning sap. This leads me to the plant that sends shivers down the spine of our pest-plant officer: giant hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, a plant I

# Shade lover



fastidiously remove the seed-head before a single baby matures, knowing that it spreads like wildfire. The sap of this big fella is wickedly harmful to human skin. I cordon mine off and warn all and sundry of its danger. I've more big-leaved plants, but no more space to describe them. Take it from me – I like (and grow) big leaves.

**Now that you've lifted and stored your potatoes, you've space for winter vegetables.** Before you bring those trays of seedlings out, cultivate and feed the soil that is to receive them. Potatoes eat heartily when they are growing and will have taken much of the nutrition from the bed, so your job now is to replace those nutrients. Well-seasoned animal manure is the best option, so if you have this at your disposal, work it into the soil. Before this, you might like to adjust the pH of your soil to suit your incoming vegetable seedlings. A simple pH kit will tell you if you need to apply lime. Animal manures and lime shouldn't be applied at the same time, so lime a week or two before you manure, and you'll benefit from both. Transfer seedlings on an overcast day for the best chances of success and least shock to the young plants, and water with warm water wherever possible.

### **Plant out silver beet in the garden to ensure green leaves for winter.**

Swiss chard, as silver beet is also known, weathers the colder months well and bar hail, withstands everything winter can throw at it. It feeds enthusiastically from the soil and if you've followed my suggestions for bed preparation, your plants will get off to a strong start that they will maintain throughout the cold season. Silver beet requires no protection from insects or fungal attack. If the season is dry though, keep the plants well watered and side dress with compost.

### **Other parts of the vegetable garden need to be monitored for weeds.**

Those left to seed will create a great deal of work later on, whereas full weed or seed head removal now will reduce it considerably. Weed seed heads can go into a satisfying, crackling garden fire and the ash delivered back to the garden. Nothing that comes out of the garden needs to be wasted and ashes are appreciated by all plants, if applied thinly.



The giant hogweed flower, 3m high and level with the shed roof.

### **Kale is an increasingly popular crop and its popularity is well-deserved.**

The leaves are especially nutritious for the winter diet, being an almost-original brassica – that is, barely modified from its wild cousin. Kale can be combined with other more familiar vegetables, or for children try adding it to a mashed-potato dish to mask its stronger flavour. Mound up soil around the stems to anchor it and prevent the winter winds from waving the well-leaved plant around and putting stress on the roots. Feed as you do silver beet, with compost and any liquid brew you have available.

**Feed also, your asparagus.** If your crop was only planted this season, you'll need to watch the progress of the ferny tops, and cut them just before they set seed. Too early, and the plant will miss the opportunity to use the filmy leaves to capture sunlight for its roots; too late, and seeds will form, dragging energy from the roots. If you've started your asparagus from seed as I have done this year, you'll want to protect your investment by being especially watchful

around the asparagus bed, as the plants will be delicate and more subject to being overwhelmed or affected by lack of sustenance.

### **If you are of the old school and have no fear that your back might break,**

you can busy yourself with deep digging. It's not my activity of choice, but there are those who swear by the process of turning over soil to a depth that seems foolhardy, and they should do so now, to beat the wetter weather. Once the soil is saturated, it weighs a great deal more and while your arm muscles might grow to impressive size through lugging that sodden stuff, your lower back will not thank you for it. I'm of the opinion that one dig is more than enough and a simple scratching about with a fork or rake will be enough for crops that follow the break-in potatoes. Others like to make like an earth-mover and shift tonnes of soil in the manner of their fathers, but the disruption this causes to the soil organisms that choose to share the garden with me is enough to convince me to take it as easy on the garden as I do on my spine. 🍀



Janet Askew's garden near Otaki is set amid ancient totara which provide shelter and a dramatic backdrop for a garden rich in texture and colour. In spring clivias light up the shade.

# A gardener's road trip to Wellington & Kapiti

Blessed with multiple microclimates, the capital and its environs has attractions for every greenfingered enthusiast says local Julian Matthews



Wellington and the Kapiti Coast offer many delights for gardeners. There are garden centres to explore, tiny nurseries selling treasures, works of art and clever street plantings in the city. As the climate becomes milder and calmer as one heads north towards the Kapiti Coast, there's a shift in gardening style, which makes this area so distinctive horticulturally. There's lots of fresh produce along the way and no shortage of excellent cafés, some conveniently attached to garden centres, each with a character all its own. Travelling home from a visit to Wellington or heading to Levin can take a while as there are so many nice distractions along the way. Here are some of my favourites.

## 1 OUR CAPITAL HAS GREAT PLANTING (AS WELL AS GREAT COFFEE).

There's excellent native plants and clever plant combinations through all of downtown Wellington, making a marvellous change from the boring annuals you used to see. Check out the free Writers Walk round the waterfront ([wellingtonwriterswalk.co.nz](http://wellingtonwriterswalk.co.nz)) featuring sculptural quotations from some of our best-known writers, and the sculpture trails ([sculptures.org.nz](http://sculptures.org.nz)), both free.

## 2 WELLINGTON'S HARBOURSIDE MARKET IS OPEN EVERY SUNDAY.

Open until 2pm (1pm in winter), it is located in the park just to the north of Te Papa on Cable Street. Fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers are for sale at great prices, and since it's mainly local growers you can draw on years worth of local gardening expertise too.

## 3 IF YOU LOVE PLANTS, VISIT THE WELLINGTON BOTANIC GARDENS.

They are famous for the tulip displays in late October, when thousands of these beautiful bulbs are in flower. Summer sees crowds flocking to the large and impressive Rose Garden, and the Begonia House is a year-round delight. When the weather's good, ride the historic cable car from downtown to its last stop at the top of the hill in Kelburn, then walk back down to the city through the gardens.



When the weather's good, ride the cable car from downtown to the top of the hill, then walk back down through the botanic gardens.



From top: Picturesque gazebo in the Wellington Botanic Gardens; a quotation to ponder on the Writers Walk; native plantings, such as this hebe and flax combination, abound in the city.

## 4 NOT FAR FROM BOTANIC GARDENS IS THORNDON GREEN GARDENS.

This garden centre at 248 Thorndon Quay is full of good plants plus a showroom with New England-style classy cushions, comfy chairs, glass lamps and pretty pots all mingling with glossy leafed indoor plants. Don't be put off by the industrial feel of the surroundings; this is a fun place to shop. Allow time to stroll around the corner and up to 25 Tinakori Road to have a peek at Katherine Mansfield's one-time home and surrounding gardens, then drive two minutes down to 134 Hutt Road to La Cloche, a real French café with superb coffee and food – the mini lemon meringue tarts are to die for!

## 5 A LITTLE WAY OUT (AT 160 WILTON ROAD) IS OTARI WILTON'S BUSH.

New Zealand's most significant native botanic garden, nestled in the capital's largest area of original forest. There are bush walks and guided tours looking at specific aspects of nature in the reserve at the weekends and on Sunday April 27 there's a Fungal Foray walk.

## 6 WHO CAN RESIST A GARDEN CENTRE WITH A GOOD CAFÉ!

As you drive out of Wellington towards the Kapiti Coast, stop at Twiglands at Johnsonville (240 Middleton Road), which always manages to have something special on offer and has a great range of annuals.





## 7 YOU MIGHT BE FEELING PECKISH WHEN YOU ARRIVE IN WAIKANAĒ.

So turn left when you get to the first set of traffic lights and drive the 5km to the beach where Long Beach Café awaits with its yummy pizzas, specially crafted beer and locally sourced ingredients cooked from scratch. Plus, there's a very well-sorted vegetable garden at the back of the restaurant which you are welcome to tour – and which goes to show what can be achieved with a bit of shelter and a lot of tender loving care in a beach garden.

## 8 RETRACE YOUR STEPS BACK TO THE MAIN HIGHWAY.

Then turn over the railway tracks at the second set of lights and head for Gus Evans Nursery, 12 Utauta Street. There are hard-to-come-by plants here, including natives such as *Pittosporum turneri*, an ultra-upright, fine foliage tree which some say will usurp *Pseudopanax ferox* as a New Zealand garden icon in future. They have ornamental bananas available too.

## 9 CANNAS GALORE ARE SOLD AT THE NORTH END OF WAIKANAĒ.

Look for the sign on the left to spot this little specialist nursery – so small it doesn't even have a name! But if the sign is out, then they're open. Go in summer to see a huge range of cannas flowering.

## 10 MAKE A STOP AT HARRISONS GARDEN WORLD AND CAFÉ.

Just north of Waikanae, at the Peka Peka turnoff is one of the largest garden centres in the area. Harrison's is immaculate and there is always something new to tempt gardeners such as the striking *Cordyline* 'Pink Passion'. Another big plus is the friendly staff, many of whom have considerable gardening experience and provide sound advice on just about anything to do with plants.

## 11 HEADING A LITTLE FURTHER NORTH, YOU HIT TE HORO.

This tiny township is well worth a stop. Pop into Hyde Park Garden Centre and you will find some hard-to-get treasures, with more lines being added all the time. The lime green, very cool *Berberis* 'Maria' in our garden came from here.



Clockwise from top left: The hustle and bustle of Sunday morning at Harbourside Market; Gus and Glenys at Gus Evans Nursery; The vegetable garden at Long Beach Café; Cannas for sale at Waikanae; Display garden at Otari Native Botanic Garden; Catchy signage at Hyde Park garden centre.





A scenic landscape photograph of a lavender farm. In the foreground, rows of vibrant purple lavender plants are in full bloom, separated by narrow green grass paths. The middle ground shows a dense line of green trees and shrubs. In the background, rolling green hills are visible under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The top of the image is framed by dark green leaves and branches, creating a natural border.

Visit Lavender Creek Farm between midsummer and early January,  
and experience the classic herb at its most romantic.

Lavender Creek Farm, Te Horo,  
in full summer glory.





Clockwise from above: Ruth Pretty's; Rachel at Harrison's Garden World; Chillies at Penray; Rusty with 'Stained Glass' at Barrett's Hostas; Nola Simpson Rose Garden.



Car-loads of people come from far and wide in early autumn for the pick-your-own chillies at Penray Gardens.



## 12 ALSO AT TE HORO YOU'LL FIND RUTH PRETTY CATERING.

Where there's sublime coffee and cake to be had and a shop full of wonderful kitchen accessories. We bought one of their simple, brilliantly efficient lemon squeezers and wouldn't be without it. Peep through the gaps in the hedge for a look at the highly productive vegetable garden that provides for the chefs – you're welcome to wander among the raised beds and see what's in season. Nice pots of annual plants are a feature here too.

## 13 SEE LAVENDER CREEK FARM ON SETTLEMENT ROAD, TE HORO.

Visit in midsummer to experience lavender at its most romantic. Harvest occurs early January.

## 14 APPROACHING OTAKI, YOU'LL COME ACROSS PENRAY GARDENS

They have all sorts available as pick-your-own, and are particularly well known for the pick-your-own chillies, in late summer and early autumn car-loads of people come from far and wide.

## 15 ALSO ON THIS STRETCH OF ROAD IS SOUTH PACIFIC ROSES.

Especially good for fans of modern roses.

## 16 AND DON'T MISS WATSONS GARDENS, BELL STREET, OTAKI.

I buy my *Rudbeckia* 'Prairie Sun' here in early summer and the spectacular big heads of sunshine yellow flowers are a talking point for months.

## 17 JANET ASKEW'S PLOT NESTLES AMONG ANCIENT TOTARA

Janet has a knack for using foliage plants well. Her Japanese maple collection is outstanding and there are hostas galore, some in pots which shows another way of using these shade lovers. In spring the mass plantings of clivias glow orange beneath the totaras. Open by appointment – admission \$5. Phone 06 364 2414.







Trinity Farm Roses will inspire anyone with an interest in heritage roses. An onsite nursery has an extensive range of these beautiful old roses for sale.

## 18 ONE OF OTAKI'S BEST-KEPT SECRETS IS TRINITY FARM ROSES.

Stop in at 202 Watohu Valley Road where Karen Piercy grows old fashioned roses with aplomb, both in the nursery and the display gardens. Open from October to end of March, there are ideas aplenty here and during early summer you can check out which are the sweetest smelling as well as the prettiest. This Easter Trinity Farm Roses is hosting a heritage arts and crafts show.

## 19 MANAKAU, BETWEEN OTAKI AND LEVIN, HAS BARRETT'S HOSTAS.

Biddy and Rusty Barrett have a wide range of these gorgeous foliage perennials available for enthusiasts.

And the size of their plants shows that they know a thing or two about how to grow them. Check out some of their new varieties, such as the outstanding and robust 'Stained Glass'. Open by appointment; phone 06 362 6950.

## 20 WE END OUR TRIP AT LEVIN'S NOLA SIMPSON ROSE GARDEN.

Planted around the township's historic courthouse building, it was renamed after the late, renowned Palmerston North rosarian. These gardens, on the corner of Cambridge and Bath Streets, must rate as some of the prettiest rose gardens to be seen anywhere. The plantings are lovingly maintained by the Horowhenua District Rose Society.

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APRIL

# Gardening odds & sods

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## NEW PLANTS



### **ORIGANUM 'BELLISSIMO'**

is a hardy, aromatic ornamental that's tolerant of hot, dry conditions. Its deep-plum bracts intensify with colour from late spring into summer, and last right throughout autumn. Grows 20cm high x 40cm wide. From the Living Fashion range, available from garden centres.



### **ZINNIA 'ZINDERELLA LILAC'**

is extremely unusual with its scabiosa-like flowers in pinky-lilac tones with a dark eye.

Stems reach 75cm high, making it ideal for cutting. A tender annual from Egmont Seeds.



### **FUCHSIA DENTICULATA**

From the cloud forests of the Andes mountains in South America, this rare species fuchsia has 70mm long cherry-red, pink, orange and lime-green tubular flowers through summer and autumn. In frost-free climates the lush, dark green foliage will remain through the year.

In other places it's deciduous, tolerating average frosts. Growing 2m high, it prefers a woodland or semi-shaded situation. From Woodleigh Nursery.





### PANSY 'NATURE MULBERRY SHADES'

will warm up any garden over the cooler months with its unusual range of pinky-purples, deep reds and golden brown. Plants are dense and floriferous, and able to cope with wind and rain. From Egmont Seeds.

## GIVEAWAYS



### PROTECT YOUR FRUIT & VEGES

Prevent insect pests and diseases ruining your crops with Tui's Single Shot concentrates. Each shot provides the perfect amount for a single application so you can avoid waste and handling issues. Tui Caterpillar Eliminator for Fruit & Veggies is fast-acting and has a one-day withholding period. Tui has eight packs including a selection of Single Shot concentrates to give away. Packs include: Insect Control for Fruit & Veggies, Disease Control for Fruit & Veggies, Caterpillar Eliminator for Fruit & Veggies, Insect Eliminator for Fruit & Veggies. Visit [tuiproducts.co.nz](http://tuiproducts.co.nz) to find out more and try the Tui Garden Problem Solver.



### WIN TRADEPLUS GARDEN TOOLS

Get ready for the autumn clean up with a set of new garden tools. The handles of TradePlus tools are American ash, NZ Pine or fibreglass in varying lengths and types. Sold exclusively at Farmlands and PlaceMakers. We have four packs, each worth \$115, to give away. Each pack includes: a cultivator, torpedo hoe, plastic leaf rake, swan hoe and a metal rake.

### COMPETITION ENTRY DETAILS

Write your contact details and choice of prize on the back of an envelope and mail to Garden Giveaways, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter online by visiting [nzgardener.co.nz](http://nzgardener.co.nz). Entries open April 6 and close May 3, 2015.



### VIOLA 'ANGEL AMBER KISS'

has unusually shaped wavy petals in warm antique shades. It's excellent for mass-planting, edging beds or pathways, or planting in containers. A hardy annual, from Egmont Seeds.



### VIOLA 'SORBET BANANA CREAM'

is a hardy annual and a stand-out performer. It's rain- and wind-resistant, flowering during autumn and spring and thriving throughout the coldest winter months. From Egmont Seeds.



### NARCISSUS 'CALGARY'

is a mini daffodil bred from the popular miniature 'Thalia'. It grows just 25cm high but its fragrant, double flowers really stand out. Blooms from mid to late spring. Available from NZ Bulbs only.



### TULIPA 'ANACONDA'

is a mini tulip growing 40cm high, with deep cherry-red blooms in mid to late spring. Looks spectacular mass-planted, or pick for the vase. Available from NZ Bulbs and Aorangi Bulb Nurseries.



Proudly supplied by



# Plant doctor

Q

## WEED OR NOT?

*What is this plant that is coming up in our lawn? Is it a weed?*

ELAINE JACOBS, FEILDING

A

It's an orchid! *Microtis unifolia*, the onion-leaved orchid is found through New Zealand, Australia, Norfolk Island, New Caledonia and east Asia. The flower stem of *Microtis unifolia* is usually 10-40cm high, but can grow up to 1m with as many as 100 flowers up to 4mm in diameter. You may find this orchid flowering between August and December.

If people didn't mow their lawns, verges and wasteland areas this would be the most commonly seen orchid. This orchid is very adaptable, growing at a wide range of altitudes from sea-level to the montane areas. It's found in outdoor pot plants and usually spreads readily, making it a bit of a pest. This orchid is, however, often responsible for getting people interested in our native orchids. There are three known onion-leaved

orchids in New Zealand and it's likely there are more in this genus yet to be named. There are as many as 200 species of native orchids in total, many of which are still being studied so they can be named and recognised.

Most orchids in New Zealand have relatively small flowers compared to those for sale that most people are familiar with such as cymbidium and phalaenopsis. Many of our native orchids are rarely seen due to their specialised and modest nature. Some native orchids are threatened species due to unnatural and natural habitat changes, mammal browsing and gathering by collectors.

The NZ Plant Conservation Network (NZPCN) maintains a helpful website with more than 28,000 images of mostly native plant species so that you can identify and learn more about our native flora. More information about *Microtis unifolia* can be seen on its dedicated profile page on [nzpcn.org.nz](http://nzpcn.org.nz).

Matt Ward, NZ Plant Conservation Network



Q

## TRIFFID ID

*A plant suddenly appeared in our garden. At first I thought it was a poppy and then puha but the leaves were too big. It grew like a triffid and was over 3m tall when it fell over. The stem and the underside of all leaves are prickly.*

HEATHER KENNEDY, KAWERAU

A

You were on the right track when you thought your triffid could be puha.

Julian Matthews, our Kapiti Coast columnist and an all round plant expert, identified it as *Sonchus oleraceus*, or common sow thistle. Also known as hare's thistle, milky tassel and swinies it's an introduced, close relative of New Zealand puha, *Sonchus kirkii*.

Sow thistle is edible. Young leaves can be added to salads or cooked like spinach. The leaves can be bitter but this can be lessened by steaming or boiling. The common names refer to its use as food for pigs, rabbits or hares. Chickens and guinea pigs like it too.

Native to Asia, sow thistle grows in full sun and can tolerate most soil conditions including disturbed areas and wasteland. It's considered invasive in many countries. In Australia it's a widespread pest.

It seeds freely from November to January and the seeds are dispersed by wind or water.

To dispose of it remove plants by hand or spray with a glyphosate weedkiller like Roundup, Yates Zero, Watkins Weedkiller or McGregor's Weed Out. No Weeds Ronstar granules will stop it germinating around established shrubs and plants but don't use this in the vegetable garden.

Barbara Smith





Q

**COMFREY TEA**

*I have a small patch of comfrey contained behind a barrier, from where it frequently escapes, and I put the leaves regularly in the compost bin. I've heard about comfrey tea. How is it made and what can it be used for?*

JIMMY WINTERS, PAIHIA

A

It's worth putting up with comfrey's invasive ways because it is so useful as a fertiliser. Comfrey's deep roots fetch nutrients from the subsoil, which are stored in its large and abundant leaves. When the leaves break down they release nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). The NPK ratio is 1.8:0.5:5.3. Nitrogen boosts leaf growth but excess potassium may stunt or coarsen it. Apply comfrey tea after the first flowers have set to boost growth of flowers, fruit and seeds.

The simplest way to make comfrey tea is to place leaves in a large bucket, cover with water and steep for three to six weeks. Seal well as it's really smelly! To make a more concentrated liquid, stack dry leaves in a bucket with holes in the bottom. Put a heavy weight on the leaves and place the bucket inside another bucket to collect the juice that forms when the leaves decompose. For both methods, strain and dilute to the colour of weak tea.

Using comfrey in compost as you are doing enriches the compost and acts as an activator, heating up the pile. Leaves can also be used as mulch around tomatoes and berries which need extra potassium. Wilted leaves laid in potato trenches nourish the growing crop too.

Barbara Smith

Q

**APHID ATTACK**

*I'm growing swan plants to encourage monarch butterflies to visit my garden. But the plants are swarming with aphids. How can I get rid of them without harming the caterpillars or the adult butterflies?*

JAN WILLIAMS, AUCKLAND

A

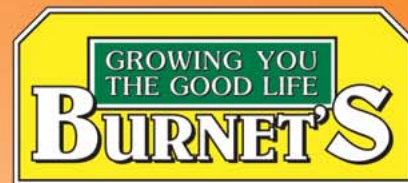
Aphids are common on swan plants. The sap suckers target new growth at the tip of each stem. Jacqui Knight, of the Moths and Butterflies of New Zealand Trust ([nzbutterflies.org.nz](http://nzbutterflies.org.nz)), says encouraging ladybirds has fixed her plants up this season. *Aphidius colemani*, a parasitic wasp (from [zonda.net.nz](http://zonda.net.nz)), also predate on aphids. In previous years, Jacqui says, she dealt with aphids by cutting off stems when she saw aphids on them, bagging them and putting them into the rubbish. Then she fed the plant well with seaweed fertiliser and compost.

Shaun Caldwell, national field sales manager for Yates New Zealand, suggests removing the caterpillars and spraying with Nature's Way Insect & Mite Spray, letting it dry completely before putting the caterpillars back.

Lianne Wilson, national sales manager for Tui Products, says Tui Insect Control for Flowers (or Fruit and Veges, it is the same active ingredient) controls aphids and doesn't seem to harm large caterpillars but will harm the small ones. It also smothers any eggs that have been laid.

Soapy water, a hose or digital control is the safest way to control aphids on swan plants without harming the caterpillars or the eggs.

Barbara Smith



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# PETER'S PATCH

How to keep your pet rabbit happily hopping with homegrown fresh vegetables

## KID PARADE



**CAPRI PETERSON (7)**

harvesting potatoes in her New Plymouth garden.



**AUSTEN MORRIS (2)**

of Arrowtown keeps an eye on the height of his corn.



**ELLA SAUNDERS (1½)**

loves watering grandma's Whangaparaoa garden.



**LILLY MCGRAW-ALCOCK (2)**

harvests a great crop of garlic in mum's Christchurch garden.



# YUMMY FOR BUNNIES

**Fresh vegetables, especially leafy greens, are highly nutritious food for rabbits and so easy to grow at home**

**R**abbits make cute, lovable pets when looked after properly. They can live inside or outside in a roomy hutch. To stay healthy, rabbits need a high-fibre diet that's low in starch and fat, which can lead to obesity or digestion issues. Grass hay should be their main food. Outdoor rabbits may have access to fresh grass if their hutch can be moved around. Green leafy veges should make up most of the rest of their diet. Two or three different greens should be provided twice a day and must be fresh, so it makes sense to grow your own rabbit tucker.

Most greens will be things you grow for yourself anyway: lettuce (cos, butter or romaine), cabbage, bok choy, lettuce, herbs (chives, sage, parsley, marjoram, basil, rosemary, borage), puha, endive, capsicum, broccoli and snow peas. You can share too: eat the radishes and carrots or

celery stalks yourself and feed the tops to the rabbits. There are some greens you might not want to try yourself but rabbits will eat: apple tree and citrus leaves, clover, dock leaves (not the seeds), plantain and marigolds. Don't pick weeds for them from roadsides or anywhere that's been sprayed.

Spinach, silverbeet and kale should be used in very small amounts as they contain oxalates which might be toxic if accumulated in large amounts over time.

Rabbits love fruit but it is high in sugar so feed only in small amounts as treats twice a week. Don't feed them high-fat, processed human food, such as chocolate, bread, cereal, pasta or crackers. Avoid rhubarb, potatoes, jasmine, privet, daffodils, corn, foxgloves, hemlock, kidney beans, broad beans, nightshade, leaves from evergreen trees, avocado, buttercups, mushrooms, oak leaves, beans, lilies and sweet peas.

## DID YOU KNOW?

*Good quality grass hay should form the biggest part of a pet rabbit's diet. They need lots of fibre to stay healthy and chewing hay helps to wear down their continuously growing teeth. Give each rabbit a large handful of fresh hay every day. They also need constant access to fresh water. Dripper bottles are best as they don't get contaminated or tipped over. Refill the water daily.*



**SOPHIE TAYLOR (2)**  
helps with the watering at  
Auckland Botanic Gardens.

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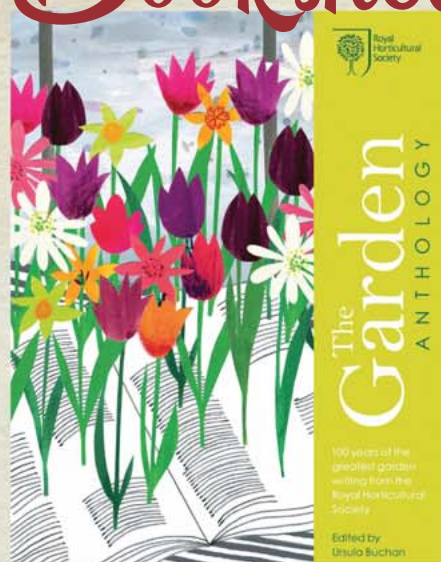


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# Bookshelf



## RHS THE GARDEN ANTHOLOGY

edited by Ursula Buchan, Frances Lincoln Ltd, RRP \$39.99

Gardening is always changing, yet never changes. This paradox is played out in this gorgeously illustrated collection of articles for the Royal Horticultural Society's quarterly magazine, *The Garden*. We can learn as much from great gardeners of the early 20th century as from Chelsea Flower Show winners of the Noughties. Gertrude Jekyll writes in 1929 of the "crude and garish" Edwardian bedding displays and suggests instead a gentler progression of colour; E A Bowles laments the destruction of his cacti collection in a particularly sharp Middlesex frost in 1908; and more recently



Kevin McCloud urges us to tear down our garden fences, and James Wong marvels at the many uses Maori have for flax.

There are chapters on the weather, environment, garden design, science and pests and diseases – the latter includes an entry titled "Secateur-happy neighbours" – as well as an account of Scottish botanists going to Afghanistan to teach plant identification and conservation.

For an anthology that's meant to cover the 100-plus years of the magazine's publication, there are an awful lot of entries from the past decade and from the editor herself, but this is still a marvellous record of the ever-evolving fashions, principles and challenges of gardening.



## A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE TO SPIDERS OF NEW ZEALAND

Cor J Vink, photography by Bryce McQuillan  
Published by New Holland, \$25.99

We should love spiders; spiders are the gardener's friend, eating all manner of bugs and pests. They're a dab hand at cleaning up fly corpses after a swatting session too. You might think arachnid-fancying is a niche interest, but this book has been picked up and intensely perused by all manner of passers-by since it landed in the *NZ Gardener* in-tray. Written by Cor Vink, curator of natural history at Canterbury Museum, it covers anatomy, feeding, reproduction, predators and classification, before devoting an entire page to each species. Special mention is due to Waikato-based photographer Bryce McQuillan – aka "Spiderman" – whose images lovingly detail the wonder of these small beasts. So if you want to identify what exactly was scuttling up from your plughole or scurrying around the woodpile, look no further. *Christine Rush*

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# Events guide



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\* Source: NZ Audited Bureau of Circulation; Total Net Circulation; July 12 - Sept 13 \*\* Source: Nielsen CMI Q4 2012 - Q3 2013

## NORTH ISLAND

### April

#### • Hollar Harvest Festival.

Celebrate the harvest spirit with family activities in the gardens. Music and entertainment, food for all, competitions for kids, and useful demonstrations. Easter Monday fun. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 10am-3pm. 0800 736 222. hollardgardens.info. **April 6**

#### • Bay of Plenty Orchid Show.

Te Puke Memorial Hall. 130 Jellicoe Street, Te Puke. 10am-4pm. Contact Elizabeth, ph 07 578 6569.

#### April 10-11

#### • Wellington Better Home & Living Show.

Westpac Stadium, Waterloo Quay, Wellington. Fri, Sat, Sun 10-5. Adult \$8, senior special Friday \$5, under 16 free. betterhomeandlivingshow.co.nz. **April 10-12**

#### • South Auckland Bromeliad

Group Annual Show. Gorgeous display of bromeliads and plenty of plants for sale. Entry and parking are free. Auckland Botanic Gardens, Hill Rd, Manurewa. 9am-3pm. **April 12**

• **Waikato Chrysanthemum Society Regional Show.** Morrinsville Presbyterian Church, Canada St. 10am-3pm. Gold coin donation.

#### April 18

#### • Wellington Botanic Garden -

guided walk. Easy 90-minute walk looking at the contrasts between 'primitive' and 'modern' trees; the elegance coupled with the clumsiness of tree ferns; the 'nice' and 'not-so-nice' aspects of plant chemistry; how kauri beats the competition; the biggest tree species in the world (not kauri); botanical connections with the wind-borne Wright Brothers; why pollen likes being yellow and why ginkgo is so odd. Meet 11am at the main gates in Glenmore Street. Cost: \$4. **April 19**

#### • Otari-Wilton's Bush guided walk

- **Fungal Foray.** Easy two-hour ramble. Meet 2pm, at the Leonard Cockayne Centre, along the Canopy Walkway, from 160 Wilton Road, to investigate the many fungi to be found at this time of the year. Cost: \$5. **April 26**

#### • Wellington Botanic Garden -

**Walk of Remembrance.** This walk looks at plants from some of the countries involved in the World Wars and plants associated with peace and remembrance. Meet 11am, at the Cable Car entrance, Upland Road for this easy 90-minute walk. Cost: \$4. **April 27**

### May

#### • Taupo Home & Garden Show.

Great Lake Centre, Story Place, Taupo. Fri-Sun 10-5 daily. Adult \$5, senior special Friday \$3, under 16 free. homeandgardenshow.co.nz.

#### May 1-3

• **National Chrysanthemum Society, North Island National Show.** Hamilton Gardens, Cobham Dr, Hamilton. Sat, 1-5pm; Sun, 10am-4pm. Free. Ph 07 843 4485.

#### May 2-3

• **Horowhenua Arts Trail.** Artwork by over 50 Horowhenua artists on display. Visit painters, potters, photographers and craftspeople in their studios. 10am - 4pm. Contact Sue Wingate 027 229 2022, email suzeywin@gmail.com. **May 2-3**

## SOUTH ISLAND

### April

#### • Dunedin Botanic Garden

**HortTalk.** Speaker: Iain Reid, *An introduction to NZ's native plants* - the launch of new fact sheets from NZ Plant Conservation Network, researched and written by Iain. He will summarise the 10 fact sheets, provide a guide to their use and distribute free copies. Information Centre, lower botanic garden, near duck pond. 12 noon. Free. dunedinbotanicgarden.co.nz.

#### April 10

#### • South Canterbury Iris Group

**free autumn seminar.** Speakers, sales table. Lunch provided. Caroline Bay Community Lounge, Timaru. 9am-4pm. RSVP by April 4 to Graham Menary, email graham.menary@gmail.com, ph 03 689 6196, cell 027 593 6806. **April 11**

#### • Akaroa Harvest Festival.

30 stalls showcasing locally sourced produce ranging from mussel and paua fritters and hand-made bresaola and chorizo, to Peninsula-sourced honey and award-winning olive oil. Live music, local wine, and traditional games like sack races. Akaroa Area School, 141 Rue Jolie, Akaroa from 10am-4.30pm. **April 10**

#### • Go Wild With Weaving

**Workshops.** Make your own beautiful baskets. Weave willow, flax, bark. Choice of six tutors. Two-day workshops. Golden Bay. gowillow.co.nz/go-wild-2015 **April 11-12**

### May

#### • Dunedin Botanic Garden

**HortTalk.** Speaker: Denis Hughes, *Blue Mountain Nurseries - the history of a southern gem.* One of the country's oldest nurseries, Blue Mountain has seen the swinging of the fashion pendulum, from edibles to ornamentals and back. Along the way they have bred unique plants, in particular, their acclaimed azaleas. Information Centre, lower botanic garden, near duck pond. 12noon. Free. dunedinbotanicgarden.co.nz.

#### May 1

#### • National Chrysanthemum South Island Show and Timaru Horticultural Society Autumn

**Show.** Exhibits from expert chrysanthemum growers, autumn foliage, berries, fruit and vegetables. Children's posy making workshop in readiness for Mother's Day. Entry \$3 or member's ticket, children free. Show entries to Secretary, Mrs J A Young, 40 Sefton Street, Timaru 7910; telephone 03 684 7676. Caroline Bay Hall, Timaru. Sat 2-5pm, Sun 1-4.30pm. **May 2-3**

## Free event listings.

Send your event details (at least 10 weeks ahead) to: Events Guide, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141; or email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with "Event Listing" in the subject line.

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### GARDENS TO VISIT

- **Coatesville country gardens.** Open by appointment. Admission charged. Ph Woodbridge 09 415 7525, Mincher 09 415 7469, Twin Lakes 09 415 8762, Pine Lee 09 414 4338, Alafois 09 414 4324, The Garden on the Ridge 09 415 7315.

### PLANTS & TREES

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- **Alliums - ball headed ornamental onions.** Details call Esme's garden 03 313 3982.
- **Alpines, perennials, bulbs for sale.** Catalogue available \$3 from Behind the Garden Hedge Garden Co, 108 Coldstream Road, RD3, Rangiora 7473. Email [behind-hedge@xtra.co.nz](mailto:behind-hedge@xtra.co.nz).
- **Bellevia, allium, cardiocrinum, eranthus, eucomis, fritillaries, galanthus, lillium, scillas, hellebores, convallaria, soldanellas, tricyrtis.** Wake Robin Nursery, 30 Harwich Street, Balclutha. Ph 03 418 4004. [www.wakerobin.co.nz](http://www.wakerobin.co.nz).

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Descriptive catalogue: send \$5 to 300 Mountain Rd, RD3, New Plymouth.

- **Lily & spring bulb 2015 mail order.**

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- **Unusual, rare plants and bulbs, perennials,** dwarf bulbs, rare trees and shrubs, most not available elsewhere. Send SAE to Hereweka Nursery, 10 Hoopers Inlet Rd, RD2 Dunedin 9077 or email: [stay@hereweka.co.nz](mailto:stay@hereweka.co.nz).

- **Wairere Nursery.** Specialist in roses, ornamental trees, camellias, magnolias, fruit trees and hedging. Also home to award winning garden designer Anthony Robert Skinner. Visit us at 826 Gordonton Road, Hamilton or visit online at [www.wairere.co.nz](http://www.wairere.co.nz).

- **Wildflowers.** Autumn is a great time to sow wildflower seed for spring flowering. Turn a dull winter garden into glorious spring colour with little effort and lots of fun. Also a great range of sweet peas for autumn sowing. Wildflower World, phone 07 928 4517 for a catalogue or order online [www.wildflowerworld.com](http://www.wildflowerworld.com).

### SHOWS

- **Taupo Home & Garden Show** May 1-3, Great Lake Centre, Story Place, Taupo. Fri-Sun 10-5 daily. Adult \$5, senior special Friday \$3, under 16 free. [www.homeandgardenshow.co.nz](http://www.homeandgardenshow.co.nz).

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# joe bennett

*In which our bard of botanica reaches out with mutual understanding across the epoques to another genius neglected and unacknowledged in his era: Schubes*

If you would like to know why Schubert's Unfinished symphony is unfinished, read on. The parallels between Schubert's life and mine are so numerous as to be spooky. He spent a few years as a school teacher. So did I. He wrote an Unfinished symphony. I've written an *Unfinished A to Y Compendium of Gardening*. In other words, Franz and I are effectively peas in a pod. So no one's better qualified than me to know what went on his head.

Poor old Schubes. Tubby of frame and five foot tall in his stockinged feet he didn't have a happy time of it. No one today denies his genius, but while he was alive very few of his compositions were ever played. He died at the age of 31, neglected, impoverished and disheartened. Officially he died of typhoid fever. Probably he died of syphilis.

He began his eighth symphony, the famous Unfinished, in 1822, six years before he died. And anyone who hears the opening bars of the great aldente movement knows immediately that it's something special. Little Schubes was throwing his all into it. It was similar for many of you, I know, when you read the "A is for Aubergine" chapter that began my *A to Y*. You recognised that here was an enterprise of pith and moment, a creation towards which an artist's life had built and which would form his legacy to the world. Like the Unfinished, it would float forever down the gutter of Time.

(And may I take the opportunity now to express my gratitude to the thousands of you who refrained from contacting me to say how much you got from "A is for Aubergine" and subsequent instalments, to every one of you indeed who didn't write that letter, who didn't put through that phone call, who didn't press "send" on that email for fear that you might distract me from the mighty task ahead, and leave mankind the poorer. Thoughtful is the word for you good people, and I would like you to know that your thoughtfulness was noted. I doubt there's a magazine in Christendom with a nicer or kinder readership and I have no doubt that this is partly due to the spiritual douche that comes from regular bouts of gardening.)

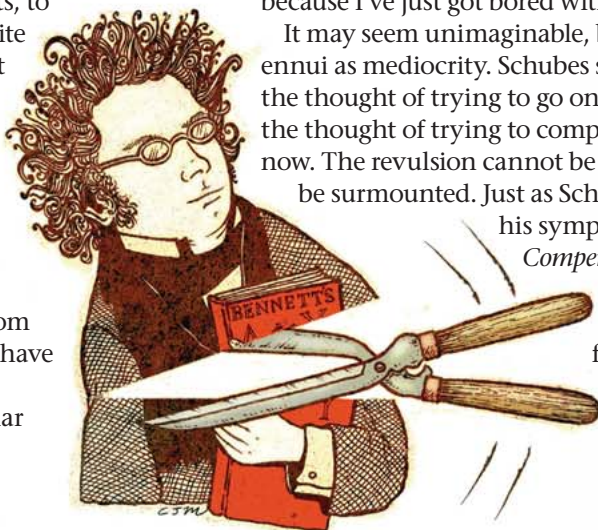
Anyway, Schubert's aldente movement, with its motifs so haunting they could have worn sheets and rattled chains, is followed by a movement escargo con alio that takes the audience to the depths of musical melancholy. From there the symphonic form traditionally leaps back into hope and sunshine scherzo vinaigrette. But with the Unfinished, nothing. The music just stops. The horticultural equivalent would be to reach the winter solstice, the nadir of the year, and then just to stay there. Forever. No spring. O Schubes, my fellow pea, what happened?

Scholars have speculated. Some have suggested it was in 1822 that little Schubes suffered the first dose of the disease that was to nail him six years later. Others that he knew he couldn't write another two movements as good as the first two so rather than spoil his creation he chose to leave it incomplete. Yet others have suggested that just as Islamic artists always include a flaw in their designs because to be perfect is an attribute of Allah alone, so Schubert felt that to maintain the faultless beauty of the first two movements would be to challenge the heavens themselves with who knew what sad consequences.

All of which are fine hypotheses but all, as it happens, are as wrong as George Bush. For I speak as one who stands now where little Schubes stood in 1822, midway through an enterprise of artistic pith and moment, the magnum opus of his life. And I have solved the mystery. I've found the answer. Schubes just got bored with it. I know so, because I've just got bored with my *A to Y*.

It may seem unimaginable, but genius is as prone to ennui as mediocrity. Schubes simply tired of the thing and the thought of trying to go on with it sickened him, just as the thought of trying to complete the *A to Y* sickens me now. The revulsion cannot be explained but neither can it be surmounted. Just as Schubes did 200 years ago with his symphony, so I am doing with my

*Compendium*, stopping irrevocably, to the dismay of thousands and the puzzlement of future scholars, not just mid-alphabet, nor just mid-sentence, but actually mid-wo 🍀





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